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THE

# OLD MAM'SELLE'S SECRET.

AFTER THE GERMAN

OF

E. MARLITT, *pseud*

AUTHOR OF "GOLD ELSIE" AND "COUNTESS GISELA."

*John, Eugenie*

BY MRS. A. L. WISTER.



PHILADELPHIA:

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# THE OLD MAM'SELLE'S SECRET.

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## CHAPTER I.

“—— but, for Heaven's sake, Hellwig, where are you going now?”

“Directly to X——, with your kind permission,” was the half-contemptuous reply.

“But there is certainly no road thither over such a hill as this. You know nothing about it, Hellwig. Hallo!—stop!—I'll get out; I have no desire to be upset and have all my bones broken. Will you be kind enough to stop?”

“Upset you? I! 'Twould be the first time in my life,” were the words upon the lips of the other; but a terrible crash interrupted him, and the voice of the speaker was silenced effectually. For a moment, the snorting and stamping of a horse were audible; then the animal, having recovered his footing, galloped madly away.

“This is an upset indeed,” growled the first speaker at last, sitting upright on the damp, freshly-ploughed field. “Hellwig! Boehm! are either of you alive?”

“I am,” said the voice of Hellwig, not very far off, as he crept about on the sodden ground searching for his hat. Every spark of self-confidence, of jeering superiority, had utterly vanished from that feeble voice. The third victim, too, was now heard complaining, as he tried to lift his unwieldy form upon all-fours from close contact with his



mother-earth. At last all three regained that posture whereby nature distinguishes man as the noblest of God's creatures, and began to reflect upon what had happened, and what was best to be done.

In the first place, the light wagon in which the three gentlemen had left their homes on that morning upon a hunting expedition, was now lying completely overturned by the side of the little hill which had caused the disaster, displaying its four wheels to heaven; the sound of the horse's hoofs as he galloped off had died away some moments before, and pitchy darkness brooded over the consequences of Hellwig's rash self-confidence.

"Well, one thing is certain, we can't spend the night here. Let us go forward," said Hellwig at last, with some reviving animation in his tone.

"Oh yes, resume the command," growled his stout friend, privately assuring himself that the splintered remains of his beautiful meerschaum, and not of one of his ribs, were making that mysterious rattling sound in the region of his heart,—*"resume the command, do,—it becomes you so well, just after you have been within a hair's breadth of murdering two fathers of families with your confounded self-conceit,—no, I will not spend the night in this den of lions—but you shall devise some way out of it. A dozen horses shall not drag me from this spot without a light. I am up to my knees in mud, and the night air will, I know, fill my bones with rheumatism for the next six months,—that I must resign myself to, and it is all your fault, Hellwig. But I will not be so insane as to risk putting out my eyes or breaking my arms and legs in the thousand holes and ditches that abound in this confounded country."*

"Don't be a fool, doctor," said the third; "you can't stand here like a milestone, shifting from one leg to the



other, while Hellwig and I grope our way to the town and procure help. I knew some time ago that this famous Jehu was driving too much to the left. We have only to go directly back across this ploughed field, and we shall certainly come to the road again,—so come along without any more grumbling, and think of your wife and children, who are perhaps drowned in grief at this moment because you are not at home at supper.”

The stout man muttered something into his moustache about ‘wretched management,’—but left his post and groped his way with the others. The task of finding the road was indeed laborious and disagreeable enough. The earth stuck in great clods to their hunting-boots, and every now and then a foot put forward with unwary confidence would splash into some deep puddle, sending the dirty water like a fountain over the coats and faces of the three wretched wanderers. Still they regained the road without any serious mishaps, and strode forward bravely when they felt firm ground beneath them,—even the doctor’s good humour gradually returned, and he hummed aloud, in a terrible bass, “Merrily jog the footpath way !”

In the vicinity of the little town a light appeared in the darkness—it advanced toward the travellers with agitated haste, and Hellwig recognized in the broad laughing face on which the light of the lantern shone, his servant Heinrich.

“Ah, gracious powers ! Herr Hellwig, is it really you ?” shouted the man. “My mistress thinks you must be lying stone-dead outside of the town.”

“But how comes your mistress to know of our misfortune ?”

“Why, you see, sir, a wagonload of players drove into the town to-night,”—to the honest fellow all actors, jugglers, rope-dancers, &c. were always ‘players,’—“and



when the driver pulled up before the 'Lion,' there was our horse, poor beast, trotting behind as though he belonged to them. The host of the 'Lion' knows the old horse well enough, and brought him home himself. Ah, what a fright Madame had! She sent me off directly with the lantern, and Frederika is brewing a cup of chamomile tea."

"Chamomile tea! Hm—I think a glass of Burgundy, or at least a good foaming mug of beer would be more appropriate."

"Yes I thought so too, Herr Hellwig; but you know how Madame——"

"Very well, Heinrich, very well,—now go forward with the lantern. Let us get home as soon as possible."

When they reached the market-square the three companions in misery separated with a silent shake of the hand—one most dutifully to drink his chamomile tea, and the others in the humiliating consciousness that curtain lectures awaited them at home. For their respective wives were never very gracious toward the 'noble passion for the chase' which distinguished their lords, and now their only propitiatory offerings, their hunting bags, lay crushed under the overturned wagon, while the sight of their muddy hunting coats would surely call forth exclamations of dismay in place of any welcoming embrace.

The next morning bills printed in huge red letters were found posted up at all the street corners, announcing the arrival of the 'renowned juggler Orlofsky, of great artistic fame,' while a young woman went from house to house in the town offering tickets for sale. She was very beautiful, this young creature, with her wealth of magnificent golden hair, and a commanding figure full of grace and dignity; but her lovely face was pale, 'pale as death,' people said, and when she lifted her darkly fringed eyelids,



which, indeed, she did but seldom, a wonderfully touching tearful glance shot from the dark-gray eyes.

She came at last to Hellwig's house, the finest on the market-square.

"Madame," said Heinrich, opening the door into the sitting-room on the ground-floor, and holding it ajar, with his hand upon the highly polished door-handle,—“the player's wife is here.”

“What does she want?” called out a stern, hard voice from within.

“Her husband is to play to-morrow, and she wishes to sell Madame a ticket.”

“We are respectable Christian people here, and have no money for such folly,—send her away, Heinrich.”

The man closed the door again. Then he pinched his ear thoughtfully and made a wry face, for the ‘player's wife’ must have heard every word. She stood still for a moment as if crushed—a fleeting blush coloured her pale cheek, and a heavy sigh escaped her. Just then the sash of a little window opening upon the passage was gently lifted, and the suppressed voice of a man was heard desiring a ticket,—a hand received it, and placed a shining thaler in the young wife's palm. Before she could look up, the window was shut down, and a heavy green curtain hung in thick folds behind the panes. Heinrich opened the street door now with a smile and an awkward bow, and the young woman took up again her weary way.

Heinrich then picked up a pair of freshly blacked boots that he had put down upon the woman's appearance, and went into his master's room, which master reveals himself to us by daylight as a little elderly man with a world of kindness and good humour in his thin, pale face.

“Ah, Herr Hellwig,” said Heinrich, while he was putting the boots in their place, “I am glad that you bought



that ticket. The poor woman looked so unhappy. I am heartily sorry for her, though her husband does earn his living so disreputably. He'll have no luck in this place, mark my words, Herr Hellwig."

"And why not, Heinrich?"

"Why? because our poor beast of a horse, which had just caused such an accident, stuck so close to his wagon when it entered the town. No good can come of that. Depend upon what I tell you, Herr Hellwig, those people will have no luck here!"

As his master returned no reply to this gloomy prophecy, he shook his shock head and left the room, stooping in the hall to readjust the mat before the door of his stern mistress's room. The 'player's wife' had pushed it a little aside with her foot.

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## CHAPTER II.

THE town hall was crowded with spectators, and fresh throngs were continually arriving. Old Heinrich stood where the press was greatest, trying to gain comfortable standing room by squaring his elbows and making private attacks upon the toes of his neighbours. "Gracious powers! if Madame only knew that, there would be a storm!" he whispered grinning to an acquaintance, as he pointed a horny finger toward one of the elevated seats at the side of the hall. "My master will be brought to confession early to-morrow morning, I'll warrant." In the direction of his finger sat Herr Hellwig, with his former companion in misfortune, Dr. Boehm.

Honest Heinrich had really had some difficulty in dis-



covering his master, so closely crowded were the benches. The programme for the evening's entertainment promised much that was new and wonderful, and concluded as follows:

‘Madame d’Orlowska will appear as an Amazon. Six soldiers with loaded muskets will fire upon her, and with one flourish of her sword she will divide in two each of their six bullets in the air.’

The inhabitants of X—— had been attracted chiefly by the hope of seeing this performance. The beautiful young creature had excited universal interest, and every one wished to see how she would look when the six muskets were pointed at her. But the previous performances of her husband were also received with applause. He was what ladies call an interesting looking man. Of middle size, with great grace of movement, regular but strikingly pale countenance, and most expressive eyes, his peculiarly accented German indicated his Polish nationality at once, and made him still more attractive as a son of that unhappy down-trodden land which has for so long excited the sympathies of the civilized world. But all this was forgotten when the six soldiers, under the command of a sergeant, marched into the hall. A murmur like the sound of the sea arose among the crowd, and was followed by a dead silence.

The Pole stepped to a table and made up the cartridges in sight of the audience, tapping each ball with a hammer, that all might be convinced of their reality. Then he presented one to each soldier, who loaded his musket in full view of every one present. An anxious pause ensued. The juggler rang a little bell, and from behind a screen his wife stepped upon the stage, walked slowly forward, and placed herself opposite the soldiers. She was a strange and wonderfully beautiful apparition. A



shield covered her left arm, in her right hand she held a glittering sword. The white folds of some heavy texture fell to the floor from under the shiny scales of the armour which covered her hips, while a dazzling breastplate concealed her magnificent bust. But the dazzle of her armour faded beside the rich glimmer of those waves of golden hair that rolled down from under her helmet until they almost touched the border of her robe.

The pale, anxious look rested full upon the barrels of the deadly weapons which were all pointed toward her. Not an eyelash quivered, not even the faintest motion in the folds of her white garment could be discerned—she stood there as if hewn out of marble. The last word of command rang through the listening hall—six shots sounded like one—the sword whistled through the air, and twelve half-bullets rolled upon the floor.

For one moment the tall form of the Amazon stood immovable; the smoke of the powder obscured her features; through its thick clouds her armour shone but dimly. Then she suddenly tottered, her sword and shield fell clattering upon the floor, she clutched wildly at the air with her right hand as if seeking some support, and, with a heart-rending shriek,—“Oh, God! I am wounded!” she fell into the arms of her husband, who hurried to her assistance. He carried her behind the screen, and then rushed back like a madman to interrogate the soldiers.

It seems that they had received strict directions to bite off the balls while biting their cartridges, and keep them in their mouths—this was the simple explanation of the trick. One of them, however, a stupid country fellow, had become utterly confused at the sight of the crowd, and had lost his head at the critical moment. When the five others at the passionate command of the juggler produced the balls from their mouths, he, to his horror, found



in his only a little powder—his ball had entered the unfortunate woman's breast.

At this discovery the wretched husband, beside himself with rage and despair, struck the involuntary criminal in the face.

Immediately the wildest confusion arose. Several ladies fainted, and countless voices called out for a physician. But Dr. Boehm, who had comprehended matters at a glance, was already behind the screen in attendance upon the wounded woman. When, at last, he came back to Hellwig with a face pale with dismay, he whispered: "There is no hope. That beautiful creature must die."

An hour later the juggler's wife lay dying on a bed at the 'Lion.' They carried her from the hall on a sofa—old Heinrich insisting upon being one of the bearers. "Ah, Herr Hellwig, was I right or wrong about that unlucky beast of ours?" he asked as he passed his master, with the large tears rolling down his cheeks.

The woman lay quite still, with closed eyes. Her unbound hair fell in masses over the pillow and covering of the bed—the golden ends lying in curls upon the dark floor. By her side knelt the juggler, with her hand resting upon his head which was buried in the cushions of the bed.

"Is Fay asleep?" asked the woman almost inaudibly, as she wearily opened her eyes.

"Yes," he murmured through his white lips. "The daughter of the host has taken her into her room; she is sleeping gently there in a little white bed—our child is well cared for, Meta, dear love."

The woman looked with an indescribable expression of anguish at her husband, in whose eyes shone the light of despair.

"Iasko," she sighed, "I am dying."



The juggler sank back upon the ground and writhed as in acute physical agony.

"Meta! Meta!" he cried, beside himself, "do not leave me! Thou art the light upon my gloomy way; thou angel who hast pierced thine own breast with the thorns that spring from my despised calling—that mine might receive no sting! Meta, how can I live if thou art not beside me with thine ever-watchful eyes, and thy heart full of unspeakable devotion! How can I live never to hear again thine intoxicating voice, to look into the heaven of thy smile! How can I live with the torturing consciousness that I have snatched thee to my arms only to crown thy life with misery! O thou God above us, canst thou plunge me into such a hell?"—Then, more gently, "I will atone for my sin against thee, Meta, I will work for thee, support thee by hard, honest labour—together we will seek out some quiet retired spot, and there live happy and contented——" he tore the spangled velvet mantle from his shoulders—"away with this vile stuff! It shall never touch me again! Meta, stay with me,—we will begin a new existence together!"

A painful smile hovered upon the lips of the dying woman. She raised her head with difficulty; he put his arm under it, and with the other hand pressed her pale face convulsively to his breast.

"Iasko, be composed—be a man!" she gasped, and her head fell back; but again she opened her eyes, as though her parting soul made one more despairing effort to cleave for a while to the dying body—those lips so soon to crumble into dust must speak once more; the heart could not cease to beat and sink into the earth with the yearnings of maternal anxiety unsatisfied.

"Thou art unjust to thyself, Iasko," she said after a pause, during which she had collected all her remaining



strength—"thou hast never caused me misery,—I have had love such as few other women can boast. I knew what I was doing when I gave my hand to the *juggler*,—and I left my father's house, where they rejected me on account of my love, with a happy heart to wander through life at thy side. If shadows fell upon that life, I only was to blame,—I who had overestimated my strength which failed sometimes beneath the disdain that thy position calls forth. I asko," she continued still more gently, "a man is exalted above the assaults of the narrow prejudices of the world by the thought that his art, whatever it may be, ennobles him,—but a woman writhes beneath the sting of the world's contempt. Oh, I asko, anxiety for Fay makes my death-bed a bed of thorns. I conjure thee,—let the child know nothing of thy calling!"

She seized his hand and pressed it closely. Her whole soul gazed once more from her beautiful eyes, whose light death would so shortly extinguish.

"I know what a cruel thing I ask of thee, I asko," she went on imploringly,—“part from Fay,—give her into the charge of simple, honest, kind people, that she may grow up to lead a quiet happy home-life. Oh, promise me this, my only love!"

In a voice choked by sobs her husband promised what she asked. A terrible night ensued—the death-struggle was long and agonizing, but the dawning morning threw the roses of its ray through the window upon a fair dead form whose transfigured features showed no trace of anguish. Orlofsky had thrown himself upon the stiffening body, and the exertions of several men were necessary to drag him from it to another room.

On the evening of the third day a great crowd followed the body of the player's wife to its last resting-place. Kind hands had covered the coffin with flowers, and Hell-



wig walked after it among the most respectable men of the place. The juggler staggered and would have fallen as the first shovelful of earth fell dull upon the coffin, had not Hellwig supported him, and led him back to the inn. There he remained several hours alone with the broken-hearted man, who until then had repulsed all attempts to express sympathy, and had even tried to lay violent hands upon his own life. Those who passed the door of the room from time to time afterward heard the agonized sobs of the unhappy man, interrupted by bursts of passionate tenderness, which were replied to by the gentle voice of a child. It was a heart-rending sound—the mingling of the tear-choked voice, and the silvery, laughing, childish tones.

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### CHAPTER III.

THE evening was far advanced. A keen November wind swept through the streets, and the first winter snow-flakes were whitening the roofs of the houses and the dark freshly-made mound which covered the fair body of the wife of the Pole.

The table was spread in the sitting-room at the Hellwigs. The service was of massive silver, and the pattern upon the white damask table-cloth shone like satin.

The lamp stood upon a little round sofa-table, behind which sat Frau Hellwig knitting a long woollen stocking. She was a tall broad-shouldered woman, just over forty. Perhaps, while surrounded by the golden light of youth, her face might have been thought handsome, for even now it possessed the classical outline demanded as a condition of regular beauty. But it could never have



been charming, for spite of the large well-shaped eye and the fair, smooth complexion, the want of what only true sensibility of soul can give to a face must always have been felt. That countenance could never have stiffened into such a hard stony expression if it had been informed by any warmth of heart. Those bright-gray eyes could never have shone so icily after a youth full of the joys and sorrows which every susceptible kindly nature must experience. Smooth bands of hair were laid above a brow still fair, and the rest of the head was covered by a spotless muslin cap. This cap and a black dress of the plainest cut with tight sleeves and narrow white cuffs at the wrists gave a puritanical air to her whole appearance.

Now and then a side door opened, and the wrinkled face of the old cook peeped through the crack.

“Not yet, Frederika!” said Frau Hellwig, each time in a monotonous voice, without looking up, but her needles flew more quickly, and the thin lips were compressed with a peculiar expression of self-control. The old cook knew perfectly well that ‘Madame’ was impatient—she liked to aggravate the mood—and at last said in an almost tearful tone as she peeped into the room:

“Ah, gracious Heaven! where can the master be? The roast will be spoiled, and when shall I be through with my work?”

This remark did her no good, for Frau Hellwig never suffered her subordinates to express any opinion in her presence, but the old servant retired with her reproof, very well satisfied, for she had seen the proof of her power in the wrinkle that had appeared between Madame’s eyebrows.

At last the street door was opened as the full, deep sound of the bell rang through the house.



"Ah, what a pretty noise!" cried the clear voice of a child outside.

Frau Hellwig laid the stocking she was knitting in a basket at her side, and arose. The impatient expression of her features was succeeded by one of astonishment, as she looked across the light of the lamp toward the door. Some one outside was rubbing his feet long and carefully upon the mat—that was her husband.

Immediately afterward he entered the room and approached his wife with rather uncertain steps, for he carried in his arms a little girl about four years old.

"I have brought you home something, Brigitta," he said, coaxingly,—but he stopped short as he met his wife's eye.

"Well?" she asked, without moving.

"I bring you a poor child——"

"Whose is it?" she coldly interrupted.

"She is the child of the unfortunate man who has just lost his wife so distressingly. Dear Brigitta, receive the little one kindly."

"But only for this night?"

"No; I have given the father a sacred promise that the child shall be brought up in my house."

These words were spoken quickly and firmly, as though the speaker wished them well over.

The white face of his wife was suddenly coloured by a deep flush, and a sarcastic expression wreathed her lips. She left her place and came slowly forward, saying, as she touched her forehead with malicious significance:

"I am really afraid, Hellwig, that you are not quite right *here*. To require of me that I should accede to such a proposal, that I should convert my house, which I endeavour to render worthy to be a temple of the Lord, into an asylum for players' children, implies something more in you than mere folly."



Hellwig started, and a most unusual flash sparkled from his kindly eyes.

"You have deceived yourself grossly, Hellwig," she continued. "I shall not receive beneath my roof this child of sin, the child of a lost creature overtaken in her iniquity by the visible wrath of the Lord."

"Indeed! is that your view of it, Brigitta? Let me ask you then what iniquity your brother was guilty of for which he was killed by a stray shot while hunting? He was pursuing his own pleasure, while this poor woman died while fulfilling a hard duty."

The flush suddenly left the cheeks of his wife, and she became ashy pale. She stood silent for a moment, with her astonished eyes resting upon her husband, who had so suddenly developed such an amount of energy in her presence.

In the mean while the little girl whom Hellwig had set down upon the floor, had taken off her pink hood, and exposed to view a charming head covered with thick chestnut curls. The little cloak too had fallen off. How stern and hard Madame's heart must have been not to have taken the child at once to her arms! Was she entirely blind to the inexpressible grace of the little figure tripping about the room upon the prettiest feet in the world, gazing at the new surroundings with childish wonder? The rosy shoulders contrasted charmingly with the light-blue woollen dress, the delicate embroidery of which had perhaps been the last work of loving hands now cold in death.

But the tasteful dress, the careless, lovely flow of the curls upon brow and neck, and the graceful movements of the child, only excited Madame's dislike.

"I will not have this puppet an hour in my presence!" she said suddenly without returning a syllable to her husband's striking reproof. "The forward little thing, with



its curled hair and bare shoulders, has no place in our discreet serious household—it would be opening our doors to all levity and dissipation. Hellwig, you will not cast this apple of discord into our midst, but will see that the child is taken hence to where she rightly belongs.”

She opened the door which led to the kitchen and called in the cook.

“Frederika, put this child’s hood and cloak on,” she said, pointing to the little garments upon the floor.

“Go back instantly to your kitchen!” said Hellwig in a loud angry voice, motioning her to the door.

The wondering servant vanished.

“You drive me to extremities by your sternness and cruelty, Brigitta!” cried her angry husband. “Ascribe it to yourself and your own narrow prejudices if I now say to you what otherwise had never passed my lips. Whose is this house which, as you falsely declare, you have tried to constitute a temple of the Lord? Mine! Brigitta, you came to this house a poor orphan—in the lapse of years you have forgotten it—and, alas that I must say it! the more labour you have spent upon this temple, as you call it, the oftener that the words God and Heaven, and Christian Love and Humility are upon your lips, the more hard, self-righteous, and uncharitable do you become! This house is mine, I pay for the bread which we eat, and I declare to you now that this child shall stay where she is. And if your heart is too narrow and loveless to feel a mother’s tenderness for the poor little orphan, I can at least require from my wife that she shall, in conformity with my will, afford her the requisite feminine protection. If you do not wish to lose all authority with our servants, give the necessary orders now for the reception of the child, otherwise I shall give them myself.”

Not another word did Madame’s white lips utter. Any



other woman would at such a moment of utter helplessness have resorted to a woman's last weapon—tears, but that relieving fountain seemed dried for those cold eyes. Her entire silence, her freezing manner, enveloped her whole form like a suit of armour, and struck a chill into all around her. She took up a basket of keys, and, still silent, left the room.

With a deep sigh Hellwig took the little one by the hand, and walked up and down the room with her. He had fought a hard battle to assure this forsaken little being a home in his house. He had mortally offended his wife. Never, never, he knew well, would she forgive him for the bitter truths that he had just spoken, for she was implacable.

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#### CHAPTER IV.

MEANWHILE Frederika placed upon the table a little pewter plate, a child's fork and spoon, and a fresh napkin. The bell rang without, and Heinrich admitted a little boy of about seven years of age.

"Good evening, papa," cried the boy, shaking the snow-flakes from his fur cap.

Hellwig took his child's head fondly between his hands and kissed his brow.

"Good evening, my boy," said he. "Well, have you had a pleasant afternoon with your little friend?"

"Yes, but that stupid Heinrich came for me much too soon."

"Your mother sent him, my child. Come here, Nathanael, see this little girl—her name is Fay."



"Nonsense! How can her name be 'Fay'? That's no name at all!"

Hellwig's eyes beamed tenderly upon the little creature to whom a mother's tenderness had given the fanciful pet-name which suited her so well.

"Her dear mother called her so, Nathanael," he said gently, "her real name is Felicitas. Is she not a poor, dear little thing? Her mother was buried to-day,—she is going to live with us, and you will love her like a little sister."

"No, papa, I don't want a little sister."

The child was the image of his mother. His features were fine, and his complexion remarkably fair and clear, but he had a habit of resting his chin upon his breast and peering at you with his large eyes from under his eyebrows, which gave him a peculiar expression of cunning and slyness. His head sank now deep upon his breast,—he lifted his right elbow, as if in an attitude of defense, and looked crossly from under it at the strange little girl.

She stood opposite him, shyly plucking at her little dress,—the 'big boy' evidently impressed her, but gradually she approached him, and without allowing herself to be terrified by his defiant attitude, she seized, with sparkling eyes, upon the toy sword which hung at his belt. He pushed her away angrily and ran to his mother, who at that moment entered.

"But I don't want any sister!" he repeated almost with tears. "Mamma, send that rude little girl away! I want to be alone with you and papa!"

Frau Hellwig shrugged her shoulders in silence, and stepped up to her place at the table.

"Say grace, Nathanael," she said in a monotone, and folded her hands. Immediately the child clasped his



hands, bent his head in an attitude of humility, and said a long grace. Under the circumstances, this prayer was a miserable profanation of a beautiful Christian custom.

The master of the house could not eat. The flush of mental excitement still coloured his usually pale forehead, and while he played mechanically with his fork, his troubled glance rested upon the sullen faces of his wife and child. But the little girl was nowise daunted. She quietly eat her dinner, carefully putting some bonbons, which Hellwig laid beside her plate, into her little pocket.

"Those are for mamma," she said, confidently; "she loves bonbons: Papa always brings her great boxes full of them."

"You have no mamma!" said Nathanael, angrily, to her across the table.

"Oh you know nothing about it," she replied, in great excitement. "I have a much prettier mamma than yours!"

Hellwig stole a shy, terrified glance at his wife, and his hand made an involuntary movement, as if to shut the rosy little mouth, which so poorly understood how to study its own interests.

"Have you seen to her bed, Brigitta?" he asked hastily, but in a gentle, coaxing tone.

"Yes."

"And where is she to sleep?"

"In Frederika's room."

"Is there not room enough, at least for the first few weeks, in our bed-room?"

"Yes, if you wish to have Nathanael's bed taken out of it."

He turned away with an expression of vexation, and called in the servant.

"Frederika," he said, "this child will be under your



care at night,—be kind and gentle to her. She has been used to a mother's loving tenderness."

"I shan't hurt the child, Herr Hellwig," said the old woman, who had evidently been listening,—“but I am come of respectable people, and have had nothing in my life to do with playerfolk. It would be a comfort, at least, to know that her parents were married."

She glanced aside at Frau Hellwig, evidently expecting an approving look for her bold answer; but Madame was untying Nathanael's napkin, and looked as though she had heard and seen nothing of the whole matter.

"This is too much!" cried Hellwig, really provoked. "Must I learn to-day that neither sympathy nor pity is to be found in my house? And do you consider yourself justified in cruelty, Frederika, because you are 'come of respectable people'? Be satisfied that this child's parents were honestly married,—but I tell you now that any neglect or ill treatment of her on your part shall be visited upon you most severely."

He seemed weary of the contest, rose and carried the child into the servants' room. She willingly allowed herself to be put to bed, and soon slept soundly, after praying, in a sweet, childish voice, "for papa and mamma, for her good uncle who would carry her back to-morrow to mamma, and for the lady with the naughty face."

Late at night Frederika went to bed. She was angry that she had been kept up so late, and made a great noise in the room.

Little Felicitas started from her sleep, sat upright in bed, and brushing the curls from her eyes, cast a terrified, searching glance around the smoky walls and meagre furniture of the small, dimly-lighted room:

"Mamma, mamma!" she cried, loudly.

"Be still, child! your mother is not here,—go to sleep



again!" said the woman harshly, as she went on undressing.

The child looked at her in terror,—then began to cry gently. She was evidently frightened by the strange place.

"And now she will rouse the house, and I must bear this too! Stop that noise, you player's brat!" She raised her hand threateningly. The child, frightened, hid her head under the bedclothes.

"Ah, mamma! dear mamma!" she whispered, "where are you? Take me into your bed,—I'm so afraid,—I will be a good little girl, and go right to sleep. I saved you some bonbons, dear mamma,—Fay has something for you. Or only let me hold your hand, and I will stay quietly in my little bed, and——"

"Are you going to be quiet?" cried Frederika, in a rage, running to the child's bedside. There was no more noise, only now and then a sound of suppressed sobs from under the bedclothes.

Long after the old servant was sleeping the sleep of the just, the child, with its little heart full of terrified longings, was crying softly for its dead mother.

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## CHAPTER V

HELLWIG was a merchant. Heir to a considerable property, he had increased his wealth by extensive commercial operations. But, as his health was uncertain, he had early retired from the business world to the narrow circle of his native town. There the name Hellwig carried great weight with it. From time immemorial the



family had been of the utmost respectability, and for years the most honourable offices in the town had been constantly filled by some one of the name. The most beautiful garden to be found outside the gates of the town, and the finest house upon the market-square, had been in possession of the family for many generations. The house reared its stately front on the corner of the Square at the entrance of a steep ascending street. Behind the window-frames of the upper stories snow-white curtains hung immovably from year's end to year's end. Only three times a year, and then just before some high holiday, did they disappear from behind the glass while the rooms were swept and dusted. At these times the huge brazen dragons' heads, which poured the rain-water from the gutters on the high roof upon the pavement below, and the birds as they flew by, looked in upon the hoarded treasures of the old merchant's house; looked in upon the old-fashioned splendour of the apartments—upon cabinets of costly inlaid workmanship with shining locks and handles—upon the rich silk damask covering of the huge down cushions of the sofas and chairs—upon high Venetian mirrors built into the wall from floor to ceiling,—and, in the guest-chambers, upon the cushioned and canopied beds, from the linen upon which issued a strong odour of lavender.

These rooms were uninhabited. The Hellwigs had never conformed to the custom of renting a story of their house.

For a century a grand and solemn silence had reigned in the upper parts of the mansion, only interrupted, at long intervals, by a ceremonious marriage or baptismal feast, and now and then, in the course of the year, by the sounding steps of the mistress of the house, who kept there her treasures of linen, silver, and porcelain.



Frau Hellwig came to this house a child of twelve years of age. The Hellwigs were her relations, and adopted her when her parents died, leaving their children destitute. The young girl led a hard life with her old kinswoman, who was stern and proud. Hellwig, the only son of the house, felt kind sympathy for her at first, but this sympathy in time was transformed into love. His mother opposed his choice, but the lover persisted, through many hard contests of will, and at last married as he wished. He had mistaken the young girl's sullen taciturnity for maidenly reserve, her coldness of heart for dignified decorum, her obstinacy for strength of character—and marriage alone banished him from the heaven he had looked for. In a short time the kindly man felt the iron pressure upon his life of a despotic will, and where he had looked for grateful devotion he found only the grossest egotism.

Two children were born to him—little Nathanael and his brother John, eight years the elder. The latter, when nine years old, had been sent by his father to a relative, a professor, the principal of a large school for boys, upon the Rhine.

Such were Hellwig's family circumstances at the time when the juggler's child was received into his house. The terrible tragedy of which he had been an eye-witness had moved him deeply. He could not forget the beseeching, unutterably humble expression of the unfortunate woman as she stood before his door. His kindly nature suffered in thinking that perhaps his house had been the last at which she had felt the sting of the world's scorn for her husband's calling. Thus, when the Pole made him acquainted with the promise exacted by his dying wife, he instantly offered to take the child himself. Only when, with the child in his arms, he left the inn with the



heart-rending farewell of the unhappy father yet ringing in his ears, and the child, clasping her arms around his neck, asked for her mother, did the thought strike him of the opposition which he must in all probability encounter at home; still he hoped everything from the beauty and grace of the little one, and from the fact that a daughter had been denied to his own marriage. With all his experience he had as yet no suspicion of the utter hardness of his wife's character, or he would have turned upon the spot and delivered the child again to her father's arms.

If the relation between Hellwig and his wife had been none of the closest before the coming of the child into the household, it now seemed as if a wall of granite divided the pair. Everything in the house went on as before. Each day Madame made her accustomed round through kitchen and pantries; her step was by no means a light one, and there was something in that dull, firm tread, exasperating to nervous ears. Her right hand glided over furniture, window-sills, and banister—Madame had a custom, which amounted to a mania with her, of brushing her large white hand with its round finger-tips and broad nails, over everything, and then carefully examining the palm to see if any atom of dust or cobweb could be found. Prayers were prayed as before, and the voices which praised the eternal Mercy and Love of God, and repeated his command which enjoins upon us to love even our enemies—preserved the same unmoved monotone. The family assembled at meal-times, and on Sundays husband and wife walked side by side to church. But Frau Hellwig, with an iron determination, avoided addressing her husband. She answered his questions and remarks in the curtest and coldest manner possible—and even contrived never to look at him, but always over or beyond him. The little intruder,



too, had no existence for her. On that first stormy evening she had ordered Frederika always to place a plate upon the table for the child, and had thrown into the old servant's room all that was necessary for her little bed. She had also ordered Frederika to open before her the little trunk containing the dainty wardrobe which had been brought from the 'Lion,' and to take out and hang up in the open air all the articles it contained, as all exhaled the sweet odour of some delicate perfume laid among them. Thus began and ended her forced care for the 'player's child,' and when she returned to the room on that evening the whole affair was for her a closed chapter. Only once afterward a spark of sympathy seemed kindled within her, when a sempstress was sent for and ordered to make two dresses for Felicitas after the same stiff pattern which she wore herself; and while they were a-making, Madame took the struggling child upon her lap, and worked at her hair with brush, comb, and pomatum, until the lovely curls were sufficiently straight and smooth to be braided in two ugly knobs at the back of her head. The detestation which Madame entertained of grace and beauty, of everything which came in contact with her narrow prejudices, and which sprang from an appreciation of ideal excellence—this detestation was stronger even than her obstinate determination to ignore the presence of the child in the house. Hellwig could almost have wept when he beheld his little darling thus disfigured, while his wife, after having exacted this sacrifice to her prejudices, was, if possible, colder and more repellant to the child than before.

And yet the little one was not to be pitied,—she could always flee from those Medusa eyes to a warm heart. Hellwig loved her as though she were his own. It is true he did not dare to make this depth of affection apparent;



he had exhausted his stock of energy on the evening when he brought the child home, but he guarded Felicitas with never-tiring vigilance. Like Nathanael she had her own peculiar corner in her foster-father's study,—there she could nurse her dolls undisturbed and rock them asleep with the little songs she had learned at her mother's knee. Nathanael did not go to the public school, he received instruction from private tutors at home, and when Felicitas attained her sixth year she shared this instruction. As soon as the snow melted and the crocuses and snowdrops bordered the yet empty flower-beds, Hellwig took the two children daily to his large garden outside of the town,—there they played and studied, only returning to the house in the market-square at meal-times. Frau Hellwig seldom visited this garden, she preferred to sit knitting in her large, quiet room, behind the spotless curtains; and there was a peculiar reason for this preference. An ancestor of Hellwig's had laid out the garden in antique French style. The sandstone mythological figures and groups which were scattered here and there in the grounds were master-pieces of art in their way. It is true the light-coloured forms stood out in strong relief against the stiff cypress walls. The charming but unveiled form of a Flora, the bare shoulders and arms of a struggling Proserpine, and the muscular figure of her grim lover struck the eye upon entering the gates, and these figures were abominations in the sight of Madame. At first she had peremptorily ordered the removal of such 'sinful representations of the human form,' but Hellwig had rescued his favourites from destruction by reference to his father's will, which expressly forbade the removal of the statues, whereupon Madame had climbing plants and roses of every description planted at the bases of the mythological apples of discord, and before long, Pluto's grim coun-



tenance was surmounted by a green ivy wig. But one fine morning, Heinrich, by his master's orders and to his own great delight, pulled up and cleared away the green parasites, until not the smallest vestige of them remained around the statues, and from that time Frau Hellwig, for her soul's sake, and because the statues had witnessed her ignominious defeat, avoided visiting the garden. All the more did little Felicitas enjoy it and make it her home.

Behind the imposing cypress walls there was a wide extent of meadow and lawn,—gigantic chestnut-trees reared their trunks from the flower-strewn grass, and a rippling brook intersected one part of the green plain,—its banks were fringed with alders and hazel bushes, and the thickly-sodded dam which had been thrown up for protection against the spring floods, was brilliant in May with yellow buttercups, while later in the season blue-eyed grass twinkled up from beneath your feet.

Felicitas studied diligently and was never restless at her lessons. But when in the afternoon Hellwig declared study over for the day, she suddenly underwent a transformation. With the flush of serious application yet on her cheek, she grew wild as if intoxicated by liberty,—she would bound apparently aimlessly over the green lawn, tossing her arms in the air, graceful as the young steed of the desert. She would climb with lightning rapidity the tall trunk of a chestnut-tree, and her face, surrounded by the masses of her loosened hair, would laugh out from among the branches,—or she would lie upon the green bank beside the brook, her hands folded under her head, and, gazing up into the arch of quivering chestnut boughs above her, would dream—build fairy fabrics of the world of the future, such as must always crowd the brain of an imaginative child. Beside her the water murmured



monotonously, the sunbeams danced upon the ripples and shimmered through the hazel bushes in bright flecks, like half-veiled mysterious fiery eyes, bees and beetles hummed above her, and the butterflies, wearied with fluttering around the rare exotics that filled the garden beds, found here their promised land, and buried themselves in the lily-cups that almost touched the little girl's cheek.

Sometimes white fantastically-shaped shining clouds would float above the tree tops, and then an incomprehensible past would suddenly fill the memory of the thoughtful child. Her mother's dress had been white and shining too, the light of the candles had illuminated the flowers that had strewn her narrow bed when Felicitas had last seen her. She wondered still why her mother had had flowers in her hands and had given her none, and why they would not let her kiss mamma, as she had always done every morning with such delight. She did not dream that that bewitching face which had bent over her with such passionate tenderness, had long since mouldered away in the earth. Hellwig had never dared to tell her the truth, for although now, after the lapse of five years, she no longer wept bitterly for her parents, nor longed so passionately to see them, still she talked of them incessantly with touching tenderness, and trusted with implicit faith in Hellwig's ambiguous promise that she should one day see them again.

It never occurred to him that the veil that he held so lovingly before her might fall from his hand all too soon; he never thought of his own death, and yet this grim phantom was noiselessly but surely coming very near. He had an incurable affection of the lungs, but, like all affected by this insidious disease, had the most sanguine hopes of recovery.

It was now necessary to wheel him in an invalid chair



to his beloved garden every day; but this he considered only a passing weakness, which did not hinder him from laying plans of every description for the future.

One afternoon, Dr. Boehm entered Hellwig's study. The sick man sat at his desk writing busily,—several cushions, which had been placed in the chair behind and on each side of him, propped the emaciated haggard form in an upright position.

“Hallo!” cried the doctor, threatening him with his cane. “What folly is this? Who, in Heaven’s name, gave you leave to write? Come, put away the pen!”

Hellwig turned round, a bright smile played about his lips. “There it is!” he rejoined, “doctor and death are sure to come together. I am writing to my boy—to John—about little Fay,—and just as you enter the house, I, who never in my whole life thought less about dying, am writing this sentence—it has just left my pen.”

The doctor stopped and read aloud: “I rely with confidence on your steadiness of character, my dear John, and wish to bequeath to you unconditionally all care for the child entrusted to my guardianship, in case I should leave this world sooner than——”

“Oh, enough! not another word to-day!” cried the doctor, as he opened a portfolio and laid the half-finished letter within it. Then he hastily felt the invalid’s pulse, and glanced furtively at the hectic spot that was burning on either emaciated cheek. “You are a perfect child, Hellwig,” said he; “let me only turn my back and you are sure to commit some gross indiscretion.”

“And you tyrannize over me outrageously. Only wait, though,—next May I shall slip through your fingers, and you can come after me to Switzerland if you like.”

A few days afterward the windows of the sick man’s bedroom stood wide open, and a man in deep mourning



left, as was the custom, the sad intelligence at the houses of friends that Herr Hellwig had departed this life an hour previously.

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## CHAPTER VI.

BENEATH the windows, hung with green curtains opening upon the wide marble paved hall where the beautiful unhappy wife of the juggler had stood five years before crushed by Madame's contempt, was now placed the coffin containing Hellwig's mortal remains. They had surrounded the earthly shell of the former merchant and financier with all the pomp of wealth. The decorations of the coffin were of massive silver, and the head of the departed rested upon white satin cushions. And, terrible contrast! around the shrunken dead face, fresh, beautiful flowers were exhaling their young life, doomed to an early death that they might adorn the dead.

Crowds of people came and went, whispering and noiseless. He who lay there had been a wealthy, influential man,—now he was dead. Men's eyes glanced shyly at the pale drawn face, but rested long on the pomp and show by which it was surrounded—the last flicker of earthly splendour.

Felicitas cowered in a corner behind the large boxes in which were growing orange-trees and oleanders. They had not allowed her to see her uncle for two days,—his room had been closed upon her, and now she knelt there upon the cold stone and gazed at that strange face from which death had taken so much of kindly expression. What did the child know of death? She had been with him in his last moments, but had never dreamed that the



red stream, which suddenly gushed from his lips, would end everything. His gaze had rested upon her with indescribable tenderness and anxiety when she was sent from the room. Outside, in the street, she had run angrily up and down beneath the windows of his bed-room, which were wide open. Why were they so careless as to leave them open when they knew how anxiously he avoided every draught of air? She wondered that no fire was made in his room at dusk, and when she begged repeatedly to be allowed to carry the lamp and a cup of tea to her dear uncle, Frederika said angrily: "Are you really not right in your head, child? Or don't you understand German? I tell you he is dead! dead!" And now when she saw him again, she scarcely knew him, he was so changed, and the idea of death began to dawn upon the child's mind.

Whenever a fresh crowd of the towns-people, impelled by curiosity, filled the hall, Frederika would come in from her kitchen, wipe her eyes with the hem of her apron, and praise the virtues of the man, whom, during life, she had so often wilfully annoyed.

"But look at that child," she interrupted herself angrily, as she discovered Felicitas' pale face, with its hot, dry eyes among the orange-trees. "She does not shed a tear! Ungrateful thing! She can't have a spark of affection in her!"

"You never loved him, and you are crying," remarked the little girl pointedly but in a low voice, as she withdrew more entirely into her corner.

The hall was gradually emptied of the throngs from the lower classes who now took up their positions in the street outside to witness the forming of the funeral procession—and the friends of the family appeared, who, after a moment spent beside the coffin, betook themselves



to the sitting-room to express their sympathy to the widow.

There reigned in the high-arched hall a momentary stillness which might have been called solemn had it not been interrupted now and then by the low murmur of voices in the adjoining room.

Suddenly little Felicitas started from her deep reverie, and gazed terrified through the glass door which led into the court-yard. There, behind the panes, she saw a wonderful apparition—he was certainly lying here with sunken eyes, and strange lines around his tightly closed lips, and yet there he was, gazing searchingly into the silent deserted hall—alive again, with the same kindly expression of countenance, although the head was partly concealed by some dark covering.

It seemed like something supernatural when the latch was gently lifted, and the door opened noiselessly. The strange apparition entered the hall. Yes, those features were indeed strikingly like Hellwig's, but they belonged to a woman—to a little old lady who, dressed richly after a fashion long passed away, slowly approached the coffin. A negligé of heavy black silk enveloped her small figure, it was short enough to show a pair of exquisitely shaped feet, whose tread was somewhat uncertain. Above the brow a profusion of snow-white curls was most carefully arranged, and covered by a black lace kerchief which was tied beneath the chin.

The old lady did not notice the child, who without moving gazed breathlessly at the strange vision, but stepped towards the bier. At sight of the dead face she started back, apparently much shocked, and her left hand dropped a bouquet of costly flowers, unconsciously as it seemed, upon the breast of the corpse. For one moment she hid her face in her handkerchief, but then she laid



her right hand in great agitation, as in solemn appeal, upon the forehead of the dead man.

"Do you know all about it now, Fritz?" she whispered. "Yes, you know it all, as your father and mother have long known it. I forgave you, Fritz. I always forgave you. You never knew what injustice you were doing! Good night—good night!"

She pressed the waxen hand of the dead tenderly between both her own—left the side of the coffin, and was about leaving the hall as noiselessly as she had entered it, when the door of the sitting-room opened, and Madame came out. Her face looked whiter than marble beneath the black crape cap which surmounted it, but her features were more immovable than ever: no trace of tears could be found in those eyes. She held a thick wreath of flowers in her hand, and was evidently about to lay them as 'love's last gift' upon the coffin. Her astonished gaze met that of the old lady. Both stood for a moment as if rooted to the spot, but an evil fire began to glow in the widow's eyes, her upper lip curled a little, showing one of her white teeth—there was something indescribably malignant in her expression. The features of the old lady also betrayed deep emotion, she seemed struggling against an almost invincible repugnance, but overcoming it at last, with a gentle, tearful glance at the dead man, she held out her right hand to Frau Hellwig.

"What do you wish here, aunt?" asked the widow, coldly, entirely disregarding the little lady's gesture.

"To give him my blessing!" was the gentle reply.

"The blessing of an infidel can have no effect."

"God hears it. In His infinite love He regards, not the empty form, but the prayer of the sincere heart."

"And of a soul laden with sin," concluded Frau Hellwig, with biting scorn.



The old lady drew up her slender little figure.

"Judge not!" she began, and raised her forefinger threateningly—"but no"—she interrupted herself with touching gentleness, and glanced towards the dead man—"not one word more shall disturb your holy rest. Farewell, Fritz!"

She went slowly out into the court-yard and vanished behind a door which Felicitas had always before found locked.

"Well, that was bold enough of the old Mam'selle," muttered Frederika, who had seen all from her kitchen door.

Frau Hellwig shrugged her shoulders and laid the wreath at the feet of the corpse. She was not yet mistress of her emotion.

Impossible as it was for the features of this woman to express gentleness and tenderness, immovable as they appeared in their iron placidity, they could be wonderfully animated by hate and contempt. Whoever beheld the evil smile which at certain moments played about her lips, could never again trust in the repose of that face. She bent over the departed as if to arrange some fold, and her hand brushed rudely aside the little lady's bouquet, which fell from the coffin and rolled upon the floor at Felicitas' feet.

Three o'clock struck. Several clergymen in full canonicals entered the hall, the gentlemen came out of the sitting-room, followed by Nathanael, who held the hand of a tall, slender young man. The widow had telegraphed her son John, and he had arrived that morning to attend the funeral. For a moment little Felicitas forgot her grief, and gazed with the curiosity of childhood at the youth who had been his father's favourite. Was he crying behind that slender, delicately white hand with which he



covered his eyes at the sight of his dead father? No, no tears flowed, and to a child's inexperienced eye, there was no sign of extraordinary emotion in the serious face except in the unusual pallor which overspread it.

Nathanael stood beside him. He shed many tears, but his grief did not prevent him from gently nudging his brother and whispering to him, when he discovered Felicitas' place of concealment. John's glance followed the direction of his brother's finger. For the first time the little girl encountered his eyes,—they were terrible eyes, serious, gloomy, without one ray in them of kindly tenderness. In the Bible there was a picture of the evangelist, 'the disciple whom Jesus loved,' a fair, gentle face, with almost feminine features, "That is our John on the Rhine!" she had always maintained, and her uncle had smilingly nodded assent. But they had nothing in common, those lovely features, with their frame of light curls, and this head with straight, closely-cut hair, and the serious, pale, irregular profile.

"Go away, child, you are in the way here," was his stern command, when he saw that preparations were being made to close the coffin. Felicitas, terrified and ashamed, left her corner like a culprit, and, unseen by all, slipped into her foster-father's study.

And now she wept bitterly. She had never been in *his* way! And she seemed to feel his feverish hand stroking her hair, and to hear his feeble, kindly voice whisper hoarsely, as it had done so often: "Come, Fay, my child, I love so much to have you with me."

But, hark! what were they hammering without there? The sound rang harshly through the high rooms, where no one even whispered loudly. Felicitas stole to the green curtain, pushed it aside, and looked out into the hall. Horrible! Her uncle's form had vanished!—that black,



wooden cover was laid above his dear face, and would keep him always lying stretched out so still! If he only lifted his hand a little he would strike it against the hard board! And that man was still hammering at the cover, so that the hand within could never lift it, never leave that dark, narrow box, where no one could breathe, and where it must be so dreadful to be all alone. The child shrieked aloud with horror.

Every eye turned toward her at the window, but Felicitas saw only the large, gray pair, whose gaze had already so terrified her. He looked at her reprovably; she left the window, and concealed herself in the heavy folds of the huge curtains which divided the room in the middle. There she cowered upon the floor, watching the door timidly, and expecting that he would certainly appear presently and send her angrily away.

From her hiding-place she did not see how the bearers took the coffin upon their shoulders, and how her uncle left the house forever. She did not see the long black procession that followed the dead body like the last shadow at the end of life's road. At the corner of the street a breeze lifted the white satin ribbons which hung down from the coffin—was it a farewell greeting from the departed to the forsaken child whom a mother's tenderness had snatched from the slough of her father's calling, only to cast her upon an inhospitable, barren shore?



## CHAPTER VII.

THE murmur of voices in the hall was suddenly hushed—utter silence ensued. Felicitas heard the house door close, but she did not know that the drama in the hall was at an end. She did not dare to leave her hiding-place—the study—but she sat down in the little arm-chair which her uncle had given her at Christmas, and rested her head upon her hands, which were crossed upon the table before her. Her heart no longer beat so painfully, but her head throbbed, and perplexing thoughts filled her childish brain. Again she seemed to see the little old lady, whose bouquet was lying now neglected upon the stone pavement of the hall, perhaps trodden into pieces by careless feet. This, then, was ‘the old Mam’selle,’ the lonely tenant of the upper story of the back buildings of the mansion—a perpetual cause of discord to Frederika and Heinrich. Frederika maintained that the old Mam’selle had a weight upon her conscience—she had been the cause of her father’s death. This dreadful story had filled little Felicitas with fear and horror, but she disbelieved it now utterly. What! that little lady, with the kind face and eyes full of tears, kill her father! Heinrich was certainly right in always shaking his shock head, and sententiously remarking, “There’s another side to that story!”

Many years before, the old Mam’selle had had her apartments in the main building, but, as Frederika recounted with ever-reviving wrath, she would insist upon desecrating the Sabbath with profane songs and pieces of music. In vain had Madame pictured to her the joys of heaven



and the pains of hell,—the godless music was continued until Herr Hellwig acceded to his wife's importunities, and the old Mam'selle was banished to the topmost story, just under the roof, of the back building. There she could do no harm, said Frederika, for not a note of the wicked music could be heard below. Her uncle, Felicitas thought, must have been very angry with the old Mam'selle, for he had never spoken of her, and yet she was his father's sister, and looked so like him; and at the idea of this resemblance a longing to go up to the rooms under the roof filled the child's heart, and she would have tried now to do so, but the thought of John's stern face terrified her—she trembled, and wondered how long the old Mam'selle had lived there behind bolts and bars.

At the end of a long, disused corridor, close to the stairs which led up from the lower stories, there was a door, and once, when the children were playing there, Nathanael had said mysteriously, "Yes, she lives up there always!" and then battering at the door with his fists, had cried out, "Old witch, up there under the roof, come down!" rushing down stairs afterward with terrified haste. Ah, how Felicitas' heart had throbbed with terror! She had expected every moment that a horrible old woman would dart out upon her, knife in hand, and seize her by the hair.

Outside, the sun was setting. His last golden rays were gilding the cross upon the gable of the town-hall opposite, and the tall clock in the corner of the room struck five just as slowly and clearly as it had struck three two hours before, when its former possessor, whose gentle hands had so regularly wound it up, had been carried out of his house never to return.

Thus far all had been quiet through the house, but the door of the sitting-room now opened, and a firm, hard tread



was heard upon the floor. Felicitas shrunk back into the curtain, for Frau Hellwig was approaching her husband's study. This seemed strange enough to the child, who never during her uncle's lifetime had known Madame to cross this threshold. She entered with unusual haste, turned the key in the lock behind her, and stood still for a moment in the middle of the room. There was an expression of unutterable triumph in the look that she cast around the apartment from which she had for so long banished herself.

Above Hellwig's study-table hung two finely painted portraits in oil, a gentleman and a lady. The latter, whose haughty features were nevertheless brilliant with gayety and wit, was dressed after that hideous old fashion which strove to reproduce the costume of the Greeks. The short-waisted white satin dress was made yet shorter in the waist by a broad gold-embroidered girdle, and the almost too luxuriant beauty of the neck and arms was barely covered, and harmonized but ill with the simple bouquet of modest violets worn at the girdle. This was Hellwig's mother.

Before this picture the widow now stood for a moment gazing at it. Then she mounted upon a chair, took the picture down from the place where it had hung undisturbed for so many years, and carefully, without any needless noise, drove a new nail into the wall just between the two old ones, and upon this nail she hung the male portrait, Hellwig's father. He now looked down alone, while the widow left the room with the other picture in her arms. Felicitas listened attentively, and heard her pass through the hall and ascend the first flight of stairs, then the second and third,—she must have gone into the garret.

She had not quite closed the door behind her, and be-



fore the sound of her footsteps had died away, Heinrich's honest face appeared at the crack.

"Yes, indeed, Frederika!" he said, in a smothered and yet terrified tone of voice, "it really was old Frau Hellwig's picture!"

The old cook flung the door open and looked in:

"Oh, good Heavens! 'tis the fact!" she cried, clasping her hands; "gracious Powers! if the proud old Frau could see that, she would turn in her coffin, and the blessed old master too. But then she was horribly dressed, with her neck so bare,—enough to make any good Christian blush."

"Do you think so?" rejoined Heinrich, winking slyly. "Let me tell you something, Frederika," he continued, counting off the fingers of his right hand upon his left thumb, "in the first place, old Frau Hellwig could not endure to have her son marry our Madame, and Madame will never forget that,—in the second place, the old lady was bright and gay, and liked balls and fêtes,—and in the third place, she once called our Madame 'a heartless devotee.' What do you say to that?"

While Heinrich was talking, Felicitas came out of her hiding-place. The child felt, instinctively, that the rough but thoroughly good-hearted old servant was now her only friend. He loved her very dearly, and it was principally to his watchful care that she owed her happy ignorance of her own antecedents.

"Ah, my little Fay, is that you?" he said kindly, and took the little hand in his hard palm; "I have been looking for you everywhere. Come with me to the servants' room,—nobody wants you here now, poor thing! If the old pictures must go, 'twill not be long before——"

He sighed, and closed the door. Frederika had already returned to her kitchen, for Madame was heard descending the stairs.



Felicitas looked timidly around the hall,—it was empty. The floor where the coffin had been was strewn with crushed flowers and leaves.

“Where is uncle?” she asked, in a whisper, as Heinrich led her toward the servants’ room.

“Oh, they have taken him away, but you know, child, he is in heaven now, and he is much happier there than here on the earth,” said Heinrich, sorrowfully.

He took down his cap from a peg, and went out to perform some errand in the town.

In the servants’ room it was already almost dark, and when Heinrich left her, Felicitas kneeled upon the narrow, wooden bench, which was placed beneath the small grated window, and looked up into the little piece of sky, which was all that could be seen among the gables of the opposite houses in the narrow street at the back of the servants’ room: “Up there?—was her uncle there now?”

She started with sudden terror as Frederika entered with the kitchen lamp. The old cook put a plate of bread and butter on the table.

“Come here, child, and eat your supper,” said she.

The child approached, but did not touch the food. She took her slate which Heinrich had brought to her out of her uncle’s room, and began to write. But hasty steps were heard in the adjoining kitchen, and Nathanael’s yellow head appeared at the open door; Felicitas trembled, for he was always rude to her when they were alone together.

“Ah, here is Miss Fay!” he cried, in the tone that Felicitas dreaded to hear. “Tell me, you naughty thing, where have you been hiding all this time?”

“I have been in the green room,” she answered, without looking up.

“Well, you’d better not try that again,” he said threat-



eningly, "you don't belong there now, mamma says. What are you writing there?"

"My lesson for Herr Richter."

"Oh, for Herr Richter!" he repeated, and with a sudden movement of his hand he wiped off everything that she had written on the slate. "And do you think mamma will be so stupid as to go on paying for expensive private lessons for you? She knows better than that, she says. All that is over now. You can go back to where you came from, and be just what your mother was, and they'll finish you so,"—and he made a gesture as if shooting, and cried 'bang!'

The little girl stared at him with wide open eyes. He spoke of her mother,—no one had ever done that before, but she could not understand what he said.

"You do not know my mamma at all," she said, half questioningly, and almost breathlessly.

"Oh, I know more about her than you do," he replied; and after a pause, during which he looked maliciously at her from under his eyebrows, "I'll bet you don't know what your father and mother were!"

The little girl shook her head with lovely innocent grace, and her eyes rested upon him with a beseeching expression. She knew the boy too well not to feel sure that what he was about to say would wound her.

"They were play-actors," he cried, with malice in every tone. "Such people, you know, as we saw at the fair, they played tricks and turned summersaults, and then went round with a plate and begged."

The slate fell upon the floor and broke into a hundred pieces. Felicitas sprang up wildly and rushed past the startled boy into the kitchen.

"He tells a lie! oh, say he tells a lie, Frederika!" she cried shri'lly, seizing the old cook by the arm.



"Well, I can't exactly say that," replied Frederika, whose hard heart was touched by some little compassion at sight of the child's fearful excitement. "They did not beg, 'tis true, but they were play-actors."

"And they played very poor tricks," said Nathanael, stepping up to the hearth and staring into Felicitas' face. She was not crying, and looked so bold and wild, with such bright sparkling eyes, that he fell into a rage.

"They did horrible things," he went on. "Your mother tempted God, and can never, never go to heaven, mamma says."

"She is not dead!" gasped Felicitas. Her pale little lips quivered feverishly, and she clutched convulsively the old cook's skirt.

"Oh, long, long ago, you stupid thing! Papa would not tell you. Over there in the town-hall one of the soldiers shot her in one of her tricks."

The tortured child uttered a heart-rending shriek. Frederika confirmed the boy's last words with an affirmative nod. Then he had not lied.

At this moment Heinrich returned from his errand in the town. Nathanael ran out of the room as soon as the old servant's thickset form appeared upon the threshold. Deceitful natures always shun the sight of an honest face. The cook's conscience too pricked her, and she busied herself with her pots and pans.

Felicitas cried no more aloud. With her arms crossed against the wall, and her forehead supported upon them, she struggled to suppress her sobs.

The piercing shriek of the child had reached Heinrich's ears. He saw Nathanael vanishing from the room, and knew that some cruelty had been practised here. Without saying a word, he drew the little girl away from the wall and lifted up her face,—it was distorted with agony.



At sight of him the child broke into loud weeping, sobbing out: "They have shot my dear mother—my dear, beautiful mamma!"

Heinrich's broad, good-humoured face grew pale with anger—with difficulty he suppressed an oath.

"Who told you that?" he asked, looking menacingly at Frederika.

The child was silent, and the old cook began to tell how it had happened, while she poked the fire, basted her roast, and did a variety of unnecessary things that she might avoid looking Heinrich in the face.

"I think myself that Nathanael might have kept it to himself for this one day," she concluded; "to-morrow Madame takes her in charge, and I warrant you she'll not be handled with gloves."

Heinrich led Felicitas back to the servants' room, seated her upon the wooden bench, and did his best to soothe and comfort her after his rough fashion. He told her as gently as he could of the occurrence at the town-hall, and concluded by saying that her dear mamma, who everybody said looked just like an angel before she died, must surely be a real angel now in heaven, and could look down and see her little Fay all the time. And then he tenderly stroked the head of the little girl, who was weeping again convulsively.



## CHAPTER VIII.

THE next morning the church bells rung solemnly in the town. Crowds of worshippers thronged the narrow street at the back of the Hellwig mansion, on their way to the church on the hill. Silks and velvets, with holiday dresses of less pretentious fabric, rustled through the church doors, worn not only in honour of the place, but with an eye to the admiration of the neighbour whom we are commanded to love.

A little figure shrouded in black slipped out of the large house at the corner of the market-square. No one would have recognized the graceful form of the little Felicitas under the thick coarse shawl, which completely enveloped her from top to toe, and was pinned together with a large pin under her chin. Frederika had wrapped her in it, with many praises of Madame's kindness in giving her such a beautiful mourning garment, and then, opening the street door, had dismissed the child with repeated injunctions not to go to the family pew as usual—her place for the future was to be upon the benches with the parish school children.

Felicitas took her hymn-book under her arm and turned up the narrow street. She hastened on at first; but in front of her there walked with solemn measured steps, three figures, at sight of whom she involuntarily lingered and held back. Yes, it was Madame between her two sons, and every one, as she passed, greeted her reverently. 'Tis true that no genial expression was ever to be seen upon that stern face, that to the poor she was a hard task



mistress and judge, that the little boy at her side abused every beggar child who asked for charity at her door, told falsehoods, and then denied them solemnly, but all that was of no consequence. They were going to church, where they would kneel praying behind the curtains of the family pew, and God would love them and one day receive them into his beautiful heaven, for they were no play-actors.

The three figures vanished within the church. The child's anxious glance followed them, and then she flew swiftly past all the open doors from which the tones of the organ were already rolling, and through which she had a glimpse of the dim religious light within, and of the crowds of worshippers.

The notes of the organ appealed in vain to the wounded, defiant, childish heart that hurried past. She would not pray to God—he did not love her poor murdered mother, and would not suffer her to enter his wide blue heaven; she was lying there lonely in the grave-yard far away,—her child would go to her.

Felicitas turned into another street yet steeper than the one at the back of the house. Then came the ugly gate of the town flanked by the still uglier tower, but through the high arch of the gate the green fields beyond were lovely to behold, and the magnificent avenues of lindens that surrounded the town contrasted with its blackened walls like a green myrtle crown upon the gray brows of age. How solemn and still it was up here! The child started at the sound of her own steps upon the gravel—she was treading in forbidden paths. But she hurried on, and at last stood, out of breath, at the entrance of the grave-yard.

The little girl had never before visited this quiet place. She had never seen before those square lots, those grassy



mounds with their white head-stones, beneath which the turmoil and hurry of life were stilled forever.

Above the iron grating of the gate two elder bushes stretched forth their dark branches laden with black shining berries, and on one side were seen the gray walls of an old church that looked gloomy enough, but then away on the other side stretched a green lawn planted with flowers and shrubs, basking in the golden autumn sunlight.

"Whom have you come to see, little one?" asked a man in his shirt sleeves, who was leaning against the door of the small house inside, where the sexton kept his tools, and blowing blue clouds of smoke from his pipe into the clear air.

"My mamma," replied Felicitas quickly, looking searchingly across to the flower-strewn lawn.

"Oh—is she here, who was she?"

"She was a player's wife."

"Oh, yes, she was killed in the town-hall five years ago. There she lies, over there in the corner by the church."

And now the poor little neglected thing was standing beside the narrow mound that covered the object of all her longing, loving, childish dreams. Every grave around was gay with flowers,—upon most of them the asters were so thick that it seemed as though God had rained down his sparkling stars from heaven upon them,—but the small strip at the child's feet was bare and desolate, only overgrown with weeds and knot-grass. Careless feet had made a pathway directly across it, and the plain square head-stone had sunk so deep into the neglected earth that the black letters upon it, 'Meta d'Orlowska,' were only just above the surface of the ground. By this stone Felicitas knelt down and pressed her little hands upon the bare mound. Earth—nothing but earth. This



heavy, senseless mass was resting upon the tender face, the lovely form in its dress of shining white satin, and the cold lily-white hands filled with flowers. And now the child knew that her mother had not been only sleeping.

"Dear mamma," she whispered, "you cannot see me, but I am here beside you; and although God does not love you,—he has not given you a single flower,—and no one cares for you, I love you dearly, and will always come to you. I love no one but you, dear mamma, not even God, who is so harsh and unkind to you!"

This was the child's first prayer at her outcast mother's grave. A light breeze rustled past, gentle and cooling as the soothing hand of a mother laid upon the feverish forehead of her child. The asters waved their starry flowers, there was a low rustle among the weeds and grass upon the grave, and above all stretched the transparent heaven in unclouded splendour, that eternal, changeless heaven which man's superstition converts into a stormy scene of earthly passions.

When, long after, Felicitas returned to the house in the Square—the child did not know how long she had been sitting dreaming in the large quiet grave-yard—she found the street door ajar. She slipped into the hall, but stood still, terrified in a corner, for the door of her uncle's room was half open, and the tones of John's voice were heard as he walked up and down there with steady steps.

Wild and defiant as was the mood which had possessed the child since the previous evening, her terror of that unmoved, cruel voice, and those stern, cold eyes, was stronger still. She could not pass the open door—her little feet seemed rooted to the stones of the hall.

"I think you are perfectly right, mother," John was



just saying, "this troublesome little child would be much better given over to the training of some honest mechanic's wife. But this unfinished letter of my father's is just as binding upon me as his witnessed will would have been. He once said that the child should never leave his house, unless sent for by her father, and with these words—"I wish to leave the child unconditionally to your care," he constitutes me irrevocably the executor of his will. It does not become me to criticise my father's actions, but if he had only known how utterly odious to me is the class of people to which this child by birth belongs, he would, I think, have spared me this guardianship."

"You cannot know what you require of me, John," rejoined the widow, in a tone of great vexation. "I have endured the presence in my house of this outcast, God-forsaken creature, for five long years. I cannot do it any longer!"

"Then nothing remains for us but an appeal, through the papers, to the child's father."

"You may appeal long enough!" replied Frau Hellwig, with a short, scornful laugh. "He is thankful to be rid of such a burden! Dr. Boehm tells me that, as far as he knows, the man wrote once from Hamburg, and never again."

"And as a good Christian you could not consent, mother, to have the child go back where her soul would be lost forever?"

"It is already lost!"

"No, mother, although, I grant you, that blood must bring with it an utter levity of mind, still I have great faith in the effect of education."

"Do you intend then that we shall go on paying money for a creature who has no earthly claim upon us? She is taking lessons in French and drawing, and——"



"Of course not, that never occurred to me," her son interrupted her—and for the first time the monotone of his voice was enlivened by some intonation. "That never occurred to me," he repeated; "I have no sympathy with these modern ideas of the education of women. In a little while we shall search in vain for women like yourself, of true Christian mind, fulfilling their duties faithfully, and never overstepping the bounds of feminine propriety. No, let all that be at an end; bring up the child well and strictly, to be what she must be at some future day, a servant. I place the responsibility in your hands with confidence, mother. With your decision of character, your Christian conscientiousness——"

Here the door was suddenly flung wide open, and Nathanael, who had evidently wearied of the conversation, ran out into the hall. Felicitas shrunk back against the wall, but he saw her, and darted upon her like a hawk upon its prey.

"Yes, hide yourself! that will do you no good!" he cried, and grasped her wrist so roughly in dragging her forward, that she cried out. "Come with me this instant, and tell mamma the text of the sermon! I'll bet you can't do it! You were not upon the parish school benches. I looked for you. And how you look! Mamma, just see her dress!"

With these words, he drew the struggling girl to the door.

"Come in, child!" ordered John, who stood in the middle of the room with his father's letter yet in his hand.

Felicitas timidly crossed the threshold. She looked up for one moment at the tall, slender figure before her. There was not a speck of dust upon his well-fitting black dress—not a hair out of place above the smooth forehead, across which he passed his white hand continually.



Everything about him was fastidiously neat. He looked with a kind of disgust at the skirt of the child's dress.

"Where did that come from?" he asked, pointing to the spot which had attracted his glance.

The little girl looked down shyly,—it was indeed a sorry sight. The grass and earth in the grave-yard had been wet with dew, and when she threw herself down beside her dead mother she had not thought of the traces which must be left upon her black dress . . . . She stood silent, with downcast eyes.

"How, no answer? You look like guilt itself. You were not in church, then?"

"No," said the child, frankly.

"And where were you?"

She was silent. She would rather be beaten to death than speak her dead mother's name to these ears.

"I'll tell you, John," replied Nathanael, "she has been out in our garden eating fruit. That's what she's always doing."

Felicitas glanced at him with flashing eyes, but did not open her lips.

"Answer," said John; "is Nathanael right?"

"No, he tells an untruth, as he always does," the child replied firmly.

John here stretched out his arm quietly, and restrained Nathanael, who was about to rush at his accuser.

"Do not touch her, Nathanael," said Frau Hellwig to the boy. She had hitherto been sitting silently by the window in her husband's arm-chair. Now she arose. Oh, what a shadow her imposing figure threw upon the room!

"You will believe me, John," she turned to her son, "when I assure you that Nathanael never tells untruths. He is a good boy—living as few children do, in the fear



of the Lord. I have taught and trained him myself—which will suffice for you. This wretched creature will sow discord between brothers as she has already done between their parents. Is it not unpardonable that she has spent the time which should have been devoted to church somewhere else—wherever that may be.”

Her eyes measured the child coldly from head to foot.

“Where is the new shawl that was given to you this morning?” she asked suddenly.

Felicitas put up her hands to her neck—it was gone; it must have been left in the grave-yard! Now she felt guilty indeed, guilty of great carelessness. Deeply ashamed, her downcast eyes filled with tears, and an entreaty for forgiveness hovered upon her lips.

“Well, what do you think of her now, John?” asked Frau Hellwig, in a cutting tone. “I gave her the shawl a few hours ago, and you can see by her face that it is already lost. I should like to know how much her wardrobe cost your father yearly. Give her up, I say. It is time and trouble lost. You can never root out what she has inherited from a frivolous, sinful mother.”

At this moment a sudden change took place in the child's face and form. A deep scarlet flush overspread cheek, brow, and neck to the edge of the coarse black woollen dress. Her dark eyes still glistening with repentant tears flashed defiance at Madame. That timid fear of her which had burdened the childish heart and hushed the childish lips for five years vanished. Everything which since the day before had excited her young nerves to the utmost, rushed upon her mind with startling distinctness. She was beside herself.

“Do not speak of my poor mother! I will not suffer it!” she cried, with almost a shriek in her usually gentle voice. “She never harmed you! We should not speak



evil of the dead; my uncle always told me that, for they cannot defend themselves. But you do it, and it is wicked, very wicked!"

"Look at the little fury, John," said Frau Hellwig, contemptuously. "This is the result of your father's ideas of education. There stands the 'fairy-like little creature,' as he calls her in his letter."

"She is right in defending her mother," said John, in an undertone, with a thoughtful glance, "but her manner of doing it is dreadful. How dare you speak so disrespectfully to this lady?" he turned to Felicitas, and a slight blush suffused his pale cheeks. "Do you not know that you must starve if she does not feed you, and that your pillow would be the stones in the street if she should turn you out of her house?"

"I do not want her food!" cried the child. "She is a wicked, wicked woman! She has terrible eyes! I will not stay here in your house where they tell untruths, and where I am afraid of being ill treated. I would rather go under the ground to my mother; I would rather starve. —"

She could say no more, for John had seized her arm in the clasp of his iron fingers, and shook her several times violently.

"Come to your senses, you wicked child!" he cried. "Fie! a girl, and so savage! With all your hereditary levity and wilfulness is there this ungovernable violence of temper? I see clearly how much has been neglected here," he said to his mother, "but under your strict discipline, mother, all will soon be altered."

He still held the child's arm roughly, and led her to the servants' room.

"From to-day you must obey me. I am master here, remember that," he said sternly; "and even when I am



far away I shall know how to punish you whenever I hear from my mother that you have not been submissive and obedient. For your naughty conduct to-day you must stay in the house for a long time, especially since you make such a bad use of liberty. You must not visit the garden without express permission from my mother, nor must you go into the street at all, except to and from the parish school, which you will now attend. You will take your meals here in the servants' room, and stay here all the time until you learn to conduct yourself becomingly."

The little girl silently turned her face away from him, and he left the room.

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## CHAPTER IX.

IN the afternoon the Hellwig family drank their coffee in their garden outside the town. Frederika put on her gay Sunday shawl and her wadded black silk hood, and went first to church and then to visit a 'cousin of hers.' Heinrich and Felicitas were left alone in the large, quiet house. The former had gone an hour before, without saying a word, to the grave-yard and brought home the unfortunate shawl, which was now lying neatly brushed and folded in the drawer.

The honest fellow had heard and partly seen the morning's occurrences, and had been strongly tempted to rush in and shake the son of the house with his brawny arms just as the latter had shaken the tender form of the rebellious child. Now he was sitting in the kitchen cutting and carving a head upon his cane, and



whistling most unmelodiously. His heart was not in his work,—he was continually casting anxious, stolen glances at the silent child. That could not be the little Felicitas. She sat there like a caged bird, but a bird untamed and full of inextinguishable anger against the hands that had captured it. Upon her knees lay Robinson Crusoe, which Heinrich had brought her from Nathanael's book-shelves, but she had not opened it. Robinson had a happy time of it upon his lonely island, for there were no wicked people there to call his mother frivolous and sinful. The sparkling sunlight shone all around him, upon the waving palms and grassy plains,—here God's light seemed almost twilight, coming through the narrow grated windows, and there was no green leaf to be seen in the street outside, or anywhere in the house. Oh, yes! there were the stiff orange-trees in the hall, and a solitary asclepias plant in Frau Hellwig's room, but Felicitas had never loved those flowers which looked as if moulded in porcelain, while the thick wax-like leaves did not stir in any breeze. What could be lovelier than the rustling murmur of the leaves in the garden outside the town when the winds kissed them!

Suddenly the child started up. Up-stairs in the garret, at the top of the house she could look across the roofs of the houses into the open country. There the sun was shining—like a little shadow she flitted swiftly up the winding stone staircase.

The old house had fallen from its once high estate. It had formerly been a knightly abode. There was still something very aristocratic in its appearance, although it did not vie with the old castles which seem to claim close kindred with the sky; yet there was an imposing air about the bow-windows, and in especial about the huge chimneys, whose size was a necessity of those old times when



deer were roasted whole upon the wide kitchen hearth. The blue blood which had coursed through the veins of the old knightly lords of the mansion was long since dried, and many years before had, like the old house, greatly degenerated.

The front of the house which looked upon the Square had been somewhat altered and modernized; but the back buildings, which consisted of three enormous wings, were yet standing precisely as the original architect had left them. There were still long echoing corridors with lofty ceilings and worn floors, where a glimmering twilight reigned even at noonday—the very places where of right some legendary ancestress in gray robes with a pale face and shadowy folded hands should wander noiselessly. One came suddenly and unexpectedly upon narrow creaking stairs which led down to mysterious doors, locked and bolted, or to some retired corner at the end of a long corridor, where through the little leaded panes of the solitary window pale gleams of light fell upon the crumbling tiles of the floor. The dust which fell upon your head was historic,—it had had part centuries ago in the framework of some balcony or in the then fresh plaster, while the blue blood was still coursing through living veins.

Wherever a place could be found for it, the builder had carved in stone the crest of the original possessor of the mansion, a Lord of Hirschsprung (Stag's leap). Upon the keystones of the arched doors and windows—yes, often upon the tiles in the floor—the powerful stag (Hirsch) was represented with his forelegs uplifted in the act of leaping across some deep abyss.

In one of the state chambers of the front mansion the portraits of the old knight and his dame were painted above the door, stiff stately figures in armour and ruff.



The haughty knight still looked proudly down upon a world where his forgotten dust had long since mingled with its mother-earth, and where his title-deeds, with their high-sounding 'forevers,' had long been destroyed.

Felicitas stood at the top of the steep flight of stairs gazing into a half-open door which had never, that she could remember, been unlocked before. What an unusual confusion the fulfilment of her revengeful purpose must have created in Madame's mind, since it had caused her to forget locks and bolts! Through this door you looked into a long corridor, leading over the back buildings, and into which several other doors opened. One of these stood open, and revealed a room filled with all sorts of old lumber, and lighted by a high dormer window. It was crowded with antique furniture, and in an old-fashioned arm-chair, on one side was placed the banished portrait of the old 'Frau.' It was not even turned toward a protecting wall. Dust and spiders might wreak their worst upon the face which the artist had completed in firm faith that it would remain an object of veneration for centuries to children's children.

The large, wide-open eyes had something terrible in them, now that the child saw them closely,—she turned away; but ah, how her little heart beat, and how the blood rushed to her head!—that trunk in the corner, covered with sealskin—how well little Felicitas knew that! Shyly, with bated breath she lifted the cover; on top lay the light-blue dress with the delicate embroidery upon the skirt and sleeves. Ah, yes! Frederika had taken it off of her one evening, and it had vanished, and she had worn these ugly dark dresses ever since.

The little hands plunged deeper and deeper into the trunk. Ah, how many things they found, and how the childish heart thrilled at sight of them! All these deli-



cate garments, beautiful enough to have clothed a little princess,—her dead mother had had them all in her hands. Felicitas remembered with painful distinctness how soft had been the touch of her mother's hand while she dressed her. Ah, there was the little striped cat that had once been the child's greatest pride. It was embroidered upon a small pouch. But stay, there was something inside—no toy, as the child at first supposed, but a little agate seal set in silver, and engraved upon it was the same leaping stag that was to be found carved everywhere upon the Hellwig house. Beneath the crest were finely cut the letters *M. v. A.* That must have belonged to her mamma, and the child's little fingers had stolen it from her desk.

A flood of awakened memories, across which now and then there flashed a ray of riper comprehension, overflowed the mind of the little girl. Now she understood the moments when, starting from sleep, she would find her father and mother standing by her bedside—he in a gay velvet mantle, and she with her lovely hair hanging loose about her—and then, on that evening, when her mother lay so still with closed eyes, and did not, as always before, snatch her little Fay to her bosom—she had been shot that night—her dear beautiful mamma!

One by one the recovered treasures were stroked and fondled and laid carefully back in the trunk; and when the lid was shut again, the little girl put her arms around it, and laid her head down upon it—they were old comrades, they two, who belonged together in a world which had not even a foothold of a home for the player's child. And the defiant little face grew gentle and happy as it lay motionless with closed eyes upon the moth-eaten lid of the trunk.

Through the windows the warm air breathed a deli-



cious odour into the dark corner where she lay. How could this delightful fragrance, which must come from whole beds of mignonette, mount so high into the air? And what sounds were those that now floated into the room? Felicitas opened her eyes, and sat up listening. That could not be the organ from the neighbouring church. Service had long been over. A more cultivated ear than the child's, would never have suspected that those tones proceeded from an organ. Some one was playing one of Mozart's overtures upon the piano, in a most masterly manner. Felicitas pushed an old table under the window, mounted it, and looked out. Ah, what a sight! There was indeed no view of the distant fields, which she had so longed for; four different sloping roofs formed a square before her eyes, and shut out any distant prospect; but the opposite roof of the four, which was much the highest, presented a spectacle to the wondering childish eyes, which transcended even the fairy tales in which she so delighted.

Upon the wide and gentle incline of this roof, instead of the gray mossy shingles which covered the others, was blooming a lovely flower garden; asters and dahlias were waving their beautiful flowers there, as secure as were their sisters in the garden outside of the town. As far as human steps could go with safety from the balcony, which projected from near the upper edge of the roof, the lovely realm of flowers extended, and where it ceased was stretched a lattice, upon which vines of every kind were climbing, showing every shade of crimson in their autumn foliage, like a gay scarf around the lovely shoulders of a beautiful woman. Wild grape-vines wreathed and twisted themselves even beyond the lattice, and stretched their spiral tendrils and shining leaves far across to the neighbouring roofs. The gallery ex-



tended along the whole length of the roof, and hung there light and graceful, as though a breeze might stir it; and yet upon the broad railing around it were placed large boxes full of earth, in which were growing beds of mignonette, and hundreds of monthly rose-bushes waved their tender flowers.

A tolerably stout white garden-chair, beside a little round table, upon which stood a delicate coffee-service of porcelain, proved unmistakably that some creature of flesh and blood had its home here, although the child still suspected that the rooms, which opened by a glass door into the gallery, must be the abode of the fairy of the flowers. No stones of the wall could be seen, it was covered with thick Scottish ivy, mingled with a creeping vine, the heavy flower cups and orange-velvet leaves of which dangled out above the glass door which was slightly ajar, and whence issued the sounds which had attracted the child to the window. One glance down into the space encircled by the four buildings, and the child began to comprehend where she was. It was the poultry-yard. Felicitas had never entered it; for Frederika, for fear lest one of its winged tenants should stray into her kitchen, or perhaps even into the hall, always locked it, and kept the key in her pocket. How often had the old cook come angrily into her kitchen, saying to Heinrich, "The old woman is watering her stupid grass again, and the gutters are all overflowing!" These thousand lovely flowers, then, were the 'stupid grass,' and she who loved and cherished them, was—the old Mam'selle, who was again 'desecrating the Sabbath with her gay music.'

These thoughts were scarcely awakened in the child's mind, before her little feet were upon the window-sill. With the elasticity of childhood, the grief and trouble that had so burdened her heart a few hours before were



all forgotten for the moment. She could climb like a squirrel. To walk down this sloping roof was an insignificant feat, and the gutters at the edges made quite a broad path for her, although they were slimy and mossy, and in the corners were crumbling away somewhat. But then they would not really break down for many years to come, and were not to compare with the slender rope upon which Felicitas had seen little girls, smaller than she, dancing at fairs. She stepped out of the window and reached the gutter at the bottom of the slope in a moment. It creaked and cracked beneath her tread, but she went bravely on,—no hold for her upon her right hand, and upon her left a yawning precipice, four stories deep,—if her mother's eyes had seen her! but all went admirably.

A scramble up the opposite roof, a leap over the railing, and the child stood with glowing cheeks and sparkling eyes among the flowers, looking out over the other roofs into the broad open country, upon which the purple shades of evening were just beginning to fall.

And then she turned and looked shyly through the glass door, which perhaps had never before mirrored a childish face. Did the ivy grow through the roof then, and clothe the walls of the spacious room? Scarcely any of the wall within could be seen through the green of the climbing vines that were planted in large boxes around it. Here and there brackets projected from among the green, upon which were placed marble busts, grave earnest faces, which contrasted strangely with the twisting vines that wreathed their white brows and sometimes even crossed their breasts, hanging down in luxuriant beauty before the two high windows, from which could be seen, across the surrounding roofs, a lovely landscape—the dark autumn forest clothing the mountain on the



one hand, and the open fields stretching away on the other.

Between the windows a large piano was placed. The old Mam'selle, dressed just as she had been the day before, sat at it, her delicate fingers touching the keys firmly, and with expression. Her face was somewhat different, for she wore spectacles, and there was a flush upon the cheeks, which had the day before been so pale.

Little Felicitas softly entered and stood still in the arch of the doorway. Was the old lady conscious of a human presence? or did she hear the rustle of the child's foot-step? She suddenly broke off in the midst of a brilliant phrase, and turning, the large eyes gazed over the spectacles at the intruder. She started, as if from an electric shock, and a low cry escaped her lips; then with trembling hand she removed the spectacles and arose, supporting herself upon the instrument.

"How did you come here, my child?" she asked at last, in a trembling voice which terror could not make harsh or ungentle.

"Over the roofs," replied the little girl in confusion, pointing across the court-yard.

"Over the roofs! that is impossible! Come here and show me how you came." She took the child's hand and led her out upon the gallery. Felicitas pointed to the dormer window, and showed how she had run along the gutters. The old lady put her hands before her eyes with horror.

"Ah, don't be frightened!" said Felicitas, in her sweet innocent voice. "I came really very easily,—I can climb like a boy, and Dr. Boehm says I am like a bunch of feathers with no bones."

The old Mam'selle took her hands from her face and smiled; the gentle smile discovered two rows of very



beautiful white teeth. She led Felicitas back into the room and sat down in an arm-chair.

"I see you must be the little Fay," she said, taking Felicitas upon her lap. "I know you, although you did not fly in here upon gauzy wings. Your old friend Heinrich told me all about you to-day."

At the mention of Heinrich the whole weight of woe again fell upon the child's heart. As in the morning, a deep blush suffused her cheeks, and anger and grief, as upon the night before, changed the whole expression of the childish face. The sudden change did not escape the old Mam'selle,—she took the little girl's face caressingly between her hands and held it up.

"Think, little daughter," she continued, "for many years Heinrich has come up to me every Sunday to attend to various matters for me. He knows how strictly I have forbidden him ever to allude to what may be going on in the house, and he has never transgressed my commands until to-day. Think how dearly he must love little Fay, to have been so disobedient."

The defiant eyes filled with tears.

"Yes, he loves me, but no one else cares for me," she said, and her voice broke.

"No one else!" repeated the old lady, looking lovingly into the child's eyes. "Don't you know that there is One who will always love you, even although the whole world should turn away from you? The dear God in——"

"Oh, He does not care for me, because I am a player's child," interrupted Felicitas with sudden violence. "Frau Hellwig said this morning that my soul is already lost, and they all say that He will not have my poor mamma with Him. And I do not love Him at all!—and I do not want to go to Him when I die!—what should I do without my dear mamma!"



“Gracious God! what have these people with their self-styled Christianity being doing with you, my poor child?”

The old lady rose quickly and opened a side door. To the child the room within seemed filled with heavenly white clouds, for before the bed, which stood in an alcove, and over the doors and windows were draped white muslin curtains. The pale green of the walls was only here and there visible among the white drapery. What a contrast between this little room, fresh and spotless as the thoughts of a pure and healthy mind, and the gloomy boudoir in the house below, where Frau Hellwig knelt in prayer every morning upon a priedieu, upon whose embroidered cushion space was found for the representation of all the cruel symbols of the Passion, but none for any emblem of the Love which endured all that suffering!

Upon a little table beside the bed was a large well-worn Bible. The old lady opened it and read aloud with much emotion. ‘Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not Love,\* I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.’ She read on, and finished with the words: ‘Love never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.’

“And this love comes from Him—yes, God is love,” she said, putting her arm around the child. “Your mamma is His child, as we all are His children, and she has gone to Him now, for ‘Love never faileth.’ She will dwell peacefully above with Him, and when you look up at night to His beautiful heaven, with its millions of

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\* The German Bible reads ‘*Liebe*.’—Tr.



sparkling stars, be sure, dear child, that Eternal Love has made no such place as hell! And now you will love this kind Heavenly Father dearly, will you not, my little Fay?"

The child made no reply, but threw her arms passionately around the neck of her kind comforter, and the hot tears gushed from her eyes.

\* \* \* \* \*

Two days afterward a carriage drew up before the Hellwig mansion. The widow entered it with both of her sons, whom she was about to accompany as far as the next town. John was going to Bonn to study medicine, and Nathanael was about to enter the school where his brother had been educated.

Heinrich stood, broad shouldered and sturdy, at the open door, and looked after the carriage as it rumbled slowly over the uneven stones of the Square. Something like a low whistle escaped his lips, a sign that he was well content, and he stuck both his thumbs into his closed hands, a provincial gesture signifying 'Preserve us from a return of misfortune!'

"Well, for nearly half a score of years we shall see nothing of those boys in this house," he said with glee to Frederika, who was dutifully holding her apron to her eyes.

"Does that please you, you blockhead?" she asked. "Is that all the thanks you have for the present the young master made you?"

"Go into your kitchen, you'll find the money lying upon your hearth. I won't touch it. You can take it and buy a red dress and yellow shoes to wear at the next fair!"

"Oh, you miserable fellow! a red dress and yellow shoes like a rope-dancer!" cried the angry woman. "Oh,



it's easy enough to see why you are in such an ill humour, —the young master served you well this morning!"

"Very much you know about it," said her fellow-servant, carelessly. He put his hands in his pockets, shrugged his shoulders, and planted himself upon the threshold of the door more sturdily than before. This excited Frederika's rage, as evincing the utmost contempt for all she had said.

"For a man with only twenty thalers wages, and at most fifty thalers in the saving fund, to stand up before his master like the great Mogul, and say, 'Give me the child, my sister will bring it up, and she shall not cost you a farthing,' and——"

"And the young master replied," concluded Heinrich, turning slowly toward the cook, "'the child is in excellent hands, Heinrich, she will remain here in this house until she is eighteen years old, and you must be careful not to encourage her in any disrespect to my mother; and if you should ever catch that old witch in the kitchen listening, nail her ear to the door instantly.' What do you think, Frederika, of my——"

He raised his hand, and the old cook ran scolding into the kitchen.

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## CHAPTER X.

NINE years had flown over the stately house in the Square, but they had left no sign of decay, no alteration either in the solid walls or in the stern profile daily seen at the window of the lower story. Perhaps an attentive observer might have noticed less distinctness of outline in the dragons' heads upon the edge of the roof, but no



wonder, they had been shedding heaven's tears continually through these long years upon the pavement below, while in the intervals of their weeping the sun had scorched them with its rays. Such changes always must alter countenances. But Madame below there stood firmly upon the pedestal of her faith in her own infallibility; in the icy atmosphere of that, there are no doubts, no conflicts, no inward struggles to break the exterior petrification, which is called 'an excellent state of preservation.'

Yet there was a striking change in the old house. For some weeks the curtains at the windows of the second story had been drawn aside, and vases of flowers stood upon the window-sills. The glances of the passers-by fell first, as usual, upon the window with the asclepias plant, behind which Frau Hellwig was still sure of a respectful greeting from all; but then the eyes were irresistibly attracted to the window above. Looking out from its stone framework was often now to be seen a charming face, fresh as a rose, a head covered with flaxen curls, and two dovelike blue eyes that looked out upon the world with childlike naïveté. To this lovely head belonged a body of exquisite proportions, clothed almost always in white muslin. Sometimes—not often—the lovely apparition at the window was accompanied by what was indeed a foil to its beauty—a little child, who had clambered upon a chair, looked over the lady's shoulder into the Square. The little face was wasted and disfigured by disease. The hand that had curled the thin flaxen hair so artistically, had laboured in vain,—it had only heightened the plainness of the face, whose pallor was further enhanced by an elegant dress, but poorly adapted to conceal the misshapen figure and swollen joints of the poor child.



Notwithstanding this contrast, they were mother and child, and had come to Thuringia on account of the health of the latter.

Within the last nine years an engineer had flourished his magic wand above and below the soil of X——, and this modern Moses' rod had revealed a bitter spring, which if it did not harden into gold and silver upon contact with the air, certainly developed precious crystal salt. The inhabitants of X—— took the hint. They established baths, the fame of which, combined with the wholesome quality of the Thuringian air, attracted crowds of invalids from the neighbouring towns.

The aforesaid lady had come to the place for the sake of the salt baths, which had been ordered for her child by Professor John Hellwig, of Bonn. Yes, Madame behind her asclepias plant had done much for her son. She had insisted in his early youth that he should be placed under the strict discipline of her relative on the Rhine, and that he should never once visit his home during the nine years of his stay there. She had sent him to Bonn—his name was upon her lips every morning at her priedieu, and she was never weary of caring for the fineness and size of his wardrobe—and now he had become a famous man.

Still the young Professor with all his fame and skill would hardly have succeeded in inducing his mother to receive his patients as tenants of her closed second story, had not these patients been daughter and granddaughter of that orthodox relative on the Rhine, by whom Madame set great store. And besides, the beautiful young creature had quite a high-sounding title—she was the widow of a Court Councillor of Bonn. It could be no degradation in the world to have a Councillor's widow as tenant,



although Herr Hellwig had always declined all civic honours himself, and thus left his widow without a title.

Madame sat on the couch by the window. Time had made no change in the fine black dress; the white collar and cuffs, and even the little brooch at her neck, were precisely as we found them on the evening when we first made her acquaintance. Her form was rather fuller, and the folds of her skirt were perhaps broader and more imposing than before. At present, her large white hands, with her knitting, were resting solemnly in her lap—the great lady had something important to attend to.

Near the door, at a respectful distance, stood a man—his thin figure was clad in a threadbare coat, and his hand, which he now and then stretched out in speaking, was hard and horny. His tones were low and hesitating, the room was so embarrassingly quiet that the ticking of the clock against the wall could be distinctly heard. No encouraging word escaped Madame's lips—she scarcely seemed to breathe, so cold and fixed was the gaze which she riveted upon the man's countenance. At last he stopped, exhausted, and wiped the perspiration from his forehead with his cotton handkerchief.

“You have applied to the wrong person, Master Thienemann,” Madame said coldly, after a short pause. “I never scatter my money about in such small sums.”

“Ah, Madame Hellwig, I never meant that,—I would not have been so bold for the world,” replied the man, coming a step nearer to her, “but you are well known as a benevolent lady who is always collecting a fund for the poor—your name is often in the paper connected with charitable purposes—all I would ask is that from your fund for the destitute you will lend me twenty-five thalers upon interest for six months.”



Madame smiled—the man did not know that this smile was death to his hopes.

“I cannot conceive, Master Thienemann,” she rejoined sharply, “how a man in his senses could ask such a thing. This is something quite new. But I know that you take no interest in the pious labours of our church members, and therefore I must tell you that not one thaler of the fund in my hands is distributed in this town. I have collected it for missionary purposes—it is consecrated gold—devoted entirely to a work well pleasing to the Lord, not to the support of people who are able to work.”

“Ah, Madame, I am only too willing to work,” cried the man, with a choking voice; “my illness has brought me so low . . . Good Heavens! many a time in better days I have spent my holiday in making some little article for your charitable fairs, because I thought they were for the assistance of some of my poor neighbours, but all the money will be sent away from here, while so many of us have not a shoe to our feet or a stick of wood in our houses for winter.”

“Pray reserve your remarks. We sometimes distribute charity in this place, but we make exceptions of those who attend mechanics’ lyceums, and waste their time in listening to lectures full of false doctrine. You had much better, Master Thienemann, stick to your work-bench than pry into stars and stones only to find in them a contradiction of Holy Writ. Yes, yes, we hear all about such blasphemous proceedings, and act accordingly. Now you know my views, and that you have nothing to expect from me!”

Madame turned away and looked out of the window.

“Good God! how much poor people have to endure!”



sighed the man. "'Tis my wife's fault,—she gave me no peace until I came here."

He looked over towards the other window of the apartment, but finding no look of pity there either, he left the room.

The poor fellow's last look had been directed towards the Councillor's widow, who was sitting opposite Madame, at the other window. If ever there were a woman apparently created to inspire hope in a heart crushed by want, it was that rosy creature in the airy, spotless white dress. The tender outline of the profile, the mild glory of the light curls above the brow, with the large blue eyes, produced the impression of a cherub's-head; but to the attentive observer it would have seemed cut in stone, for while Madame's face had now and then been suffused by a flush, while the poor man had eloquently pleaded his cause and told his woes, nothing had disturbed for a moment the smiling repose of that countenance. The lovely bosom rose and fell without any agitation, the rose upon her embroidery had received an additional leaf during the last few minutes, and no mistake could possibly have been found in the carefully counted stitches.

"Do not let it vex you, dear aunt," she said, looking up with a gentle, beseeching glance, when Master Thiennemann had left the room. "My poor husband could not endure these *progressive* mechanics, and the lyceums were odious to him. Ah, here is Caroline!"

And she pointed to the door leading to the kitchen. A young girl had been standing there for some minutes, having entered noiselessly, even before the carpenter had left the room. Any one who fourteen years before had seen the beautiful young wife of the juggler as she stood before the muskets of the soldiers, would have started



with involuntary terror at what must for a moment have seemed to him a resurrection from the dead. There was the same graceful figure, somewhat slighter and more maidenly, and clad in coarse dark stuff, while that unfortunate woman had been surrounded by the glittering tinsel of the theatre. There was the same faultlessly shaped head, the same low white forehead, and that slight depression of the corners of the mouth, which gave to the face an enchanting expression of melancholy. This expression had, with the unhappy mother, been heightened by the tearful glance of dark-gray eyes; but when the young girl lifted her darkly fringed eyelids, she disclosed sparkling eyes of dark-brown. They bore witness to a nature which could never be crushed into submissive endurance,—there was power and resistance in their gaze,—was not Polish blood flowing in her veins,—drops from that noble stream which has always risen fruitlessly against oppression?

We know now that the young girl standing at the door is Felicitas, although she answers to the simple name of Caroline. The 'theatrical name' had been discarded long ago, with the 'theatrical stuff' in the lumber-room, by Madame.

Felicitas approached the mistress of the house, and laid upon her work-table an exquisitely embroidered lace handkerchief. The Councillor's widow hastily took it up.

"Is this to be sold for the benefit of the mission?" she asked, as she unfolded it and examined the embroidery.

"Yes," replied Madame,—"I had Caroline work it for that purpose. She has been long enough about it. I suppose it will bring three thalers?"

"Perhaps so," said the Councillor's widow, shrugging her shoulders. "Where did you get the pattern for the corners, dear child?"



A fleeting blush mounted to Felicitas' cheek: "I designed it myself," she replied gently.

The young widow looked up quickly: "Designed it yourself!" she repeated slowly, and her blue eyes seemed to have in them a shade of green. "I don't mean to vex you, child,—but, try as I may, I cannot conceive of such temerity. How could you attempt such a thing, with no knowledge of drawing? This is genuine lace,—it must have cost aunt at least a thaler, and now it is ruined by that clumsy pattern."

Frau Hellwig looked up angrily.

"Ah, do not be angry with Caroline, dear aunt," the young widow entreated, in a gentle, beseeching tone. "She meant well, I am sure. Perhaps the evil can be remedied. See here, my child, I have never studied drawing, I confess,—the idea of the pencil in a woman's hand does not please me,—but I have, nevertheless, the truest eye for outline. Heavens! look what a monstrous leaf that is!"

She pointed to a long leaf, the point of which was most artistically curled. Felicitas answered not a word—but she compressed her beautiful lips, and gazed fixedly in the face of her critic. The Councillor's widow turned hastily away, and covered her eyes with her hand.

"Ah, dear child, that piercing look again!" she said, complainingly. "It really does not become a young girl in your position to stare so at other people. Think of what your best friend, our good Secretary Wellner, always says: 'Sweet humility, dear Caroline.' And there is that contemptuous expression around your mouth again—it is too provoking. Do you really mean to play a romantic part, and obstinately reject the excellent man's proposal just because—you do not love him? Ri-



diculous! But my cousin John will have a word or two to say to this matter!"

How perfect the girl had become in the habit of self-control! At the young widow's last words, the hot rebellious blood mounted to her forehead—and the head thrown back showed for a moment something almost demonic in its expression of hate and contempt. But she immediately replied, coldly and quietly: "I shall be quite ready to hear them."

"How often must I request you, Adele, not to allude to that provoking affair?" said Frau Hellwig angrily "Do you imagine that you can in two or three weeks bend this stick of wood—this obstinacy which I have laboured at nine years in vain? As soon as John comes, the whole matter will be at an end, to my infinite joy. Now go and bring me my bonnet and shawl," turning to Felicitas, "I hope this wretched piece of work," throwing the handkerchief contemptuously aside, "will be the last that you will have an opportunity of spoiling in my service!"

Felicitas left the room silently. Shortly afterward Frau Hellwig and her guest walked across the Square. The beautiful widow led her child tenderly by the hand. Several people gazed after her from their windows,—the lovely creature had a gentle childlike smile for all. Rosa, her maid, and Frederika, followed with baskets. Tea was to be drank in the garden outside of the town—and long wreaths and garlands were to be made.

To-morrow the young Professor was expected home after his nine-years' absence, and although Madame muttered something about 'silly nonsense,' the Councillor's young widow was determined to decorate the young man's room in honour of his arrival.



## CHAPTER XI.

HEINRICH closed the street door and Felicitas flew up stairs. How dear to the young girl was the narrow passage through which she now hurried! Then came a quiet landing—a winding staircase, with large worm-eaten steps, that ascended from the twilight below to where a faint ray of light through old green glass panes revealed an ancient door, covered with stiffly painted tulips and brick-red roses. Felicitas took a key from her pocket and noiselessly opened this door, on the other side of which was a narrow dark flight of steps leading to the rooms under the roof.

The young girl had never made another expedition over the roofs. Ever since that first day when she had made her unexpected appearance there, Mam'selle's rooms had been always open to her. For the first year her visits there had been paid only on Sundays, and then always in Heinrich's society. But after her confirmation, Mam'selle had given her a key to the painted door, and after that she had slipped up at every spare moment. Thus she led a double existence. It was not only the material change from dim twilight below to the clear sunlight above—her mind experienced a like change—and at last grew so strong that all the care and anxiety of the lower world vanished as soon as she began to ascend the dark, narrow staircase. Below stairs she ironed and swept and dusted, using her leisure, as it was called, in embroidering articles, which were, as we have seen, devoted to the benefit of the missions, and except in her Bible and prayer book, all reading was strictly forbidden her.



But in Mam'selle's home the rich domain of the human intellect lay wide open for her. She studied with avidity, and the knowledge possessed by the mysterious inhabitant of those rooms was like an inexhaustible fountain, like a well-cut diamond, emitting brilliant sparks of light in whatever direction it was turned. Except Heinrich, no one in the house knew of the intercourse between the young girl and the old Mam'selle,—the least suspicion of it on the part of Madame would have been its deathblow. Although Mam'selle had strictly enjoined upon the child always to tell the truth if questioned upon the subject, Heinrich had guarded the secret so closely that no questions had ever been asked—he was always on the watch with open eyes and ears.

The dark staircase was ascended, Felicitas stood listening before a door, then pushed a little panel in it aside, and looked in smiling. Within there was a perfect hubbub of singing and chirping. In the middle of the room two young firs were planted in huge tubs, and all around the walls was growing a perfect grove of plants, fresh and green, upon the boughs of which was perched a multitude of birds. This was the only life with which the old Mam'selle could surround herself up here in her hermitage. 'Tis true these little voices always sung the same thing, but then there was no chance of the change which characterizes the voices that can cry 'Hosanna!' one day and 'Crucify him' the next. Felicitas closed the panel and opened another door. The reader has already seen the interior of this ivy-draped apartment, nine years ago—he knows the collection of grave busts that is ranged around the walls—but he does not know how nearly they are allied to those large books bound in red morocco, which he may see behind the glass doors of that antique cabinet. From behind those grave brows a



mighty flood of inspiration broke, and there is no loneliness, no desolation for those who can bathe in it. The images and the works of the master-composers of various times shared the old Mam'selle's asylum, and as the ivy wreathed itself impartially around all the busts, so did Mam'selle enjoy the old Italian and the German schools with equal relish. But that cabinet with glass doors concealed treasures which would have thrown an autograph collector into ecstasies. Manuscripts and letters of those old masters, most of them of rare worth, were in portfolios behind those doors. This collection had been made many years before, when, as the old Mam'selle said with a smile, her young blood was flowing cheerily in her veins and her youthful energies stood waiting to carry out her wishes,—many a faded autograph had been the result of girlish perseverance and self-sacrifice.

Felicitas found the old Mam'selle in a room behind her bed-room. She was sitting upon a foot-stool before an open drawer, and all around her, upon chairs and on the floor, lay bundles of linen and flannel, and a multitude of garments, so small that they were evidently designed to receive some little human existence after its first cry in the world. Her delicate features were sensibly altered, and although she looked up with a welcoming smile, the traces which the last nine years had left upon her kindly countenance could not be ignored.

"I am so glad you have come, my dear Fay!" she exclaimed. "The stork has just paid a visit to poor Master Thienemann's wife—and the poor woman has nothing, not even a roll of linen, for the baby. We have good store here, though; there is not much to be done, and we can send off a most respectable bundle if you will only take a few stitches for me," and she held up a little cap in one hand and a roll of very narrow lace in the other.



"Ah, Aunt Cordula," said Felicitas, taking up her needle and thread, "these poor people need more than all this! I have just learned that Master Thienemann needs money sadly—twenty-five thalers."

The old Mam'selle pondered for a moment.

"Hm!—rather a large sum for my present finances," said she, "but he must have it."

She arose slowly and feebly. Felicitas offered her arm and supported her to the music-room.

"But, aunt," she said suddenly standing still, "do you remember a little while ago Frau Thienemann refused to make up that linen for you for fear of offending Madame?"

"I really believe you will do your best to lead your old aunt astray," cried the old Mam'selle, half angrily,—but her eyes smiled playfully, and she lightly tapped the young girl's cheek with her slender finger. Both laughed, and crossed the room to the cabinet with the glass doors.

This worm-eaten antique piece of furniture could be mysterious too. Aunt Cordula pressed a very innocent-looking ornament, and a little door immediately flew open in one of the sides. The space thus disclosed was the Mam'selle's bank, and in former years had seemed to Felicitas an inexhaustible mine of fairy treasures, so bewitching had been the few glimpses that she had had of the wonders that it contained;—on the shelves inside were several rolls of gold, a quantity of silver plate, and various articles of jewelry.

While Aunt Cordula opened one of the rolls of gold, and counted out the thalers carefully, Felicitas seized upon a little box, which was almost hidden in a dark corner, and opened it eagerly. Within was a golden bracelet lying upon cotton wool,—no precious stone enriched it, but its weight showed it to be of massive solid gold. The most remarkable thing about it, however, was



its size. It seemed to have been made for the muscular wrist of a man,—it would certainly have slipped over any woman's hand. Towards the middle it was very broad, and here the graver's tool had carved a graceful wreath of roses and leaves, wonderfully well executed, enclosing a medallion, upon which was engraved the following verse:

Swa lieb ein ander meinent,  
Herzenlichen âne wanc,  
Und sich beidiu so vereinet,—

The young girl turned the bracelet in every direction, looking for the rest of the verse,—for although not very learned in old German, she easily translated the last line into 'And where both are so united,'—but that could not be the end.

"Aunt Cordula, do you know the rest?" she asked, still examining the bracelet.

The old Mam'selle pressed her finger upon the thaler she had just put down, and looked up in the midst of her counting.

"Oh, child! what have you got there?" she exclaimed hastily, with displeasure, terror, and grief all expressed in the tones of her voice. She took the bracelet instantly, and with trembling fingers laid it back in its box and closed the cover. A delicate colour flushed her pale cheeks, and her knit brows lent an expression of brooding melancholy to her face, which Felicitas had never seen there before. Yes,—it seemed as though for a few moments the present had vanished utterly beneath the flood of recollection which was overwhelming the old Mam'selle's mind,—as if the presence of Felicitas were utterly forgotten,—for after she had restored the bracelet to its place in the corner with feverish haste, she took up



another box standing beside it covered with gray paper, and smoothed its worn corners and stroked it caressingly, —her face grew gentle again, and she murmured as she pressed the box between her shrunken hands: "It must die before me—and yet I cannot look on and see it perish."

Felicitas threw her arms around the feeble little figure, which seemed for a moment so frail and helpless. It was the first time in the nine years of their intercourse that she had ever seen Aunt Cordula lose her self-control. Delicate and frail as she seemed to the eye, her strength of mind and soul never forsook her. No outward circumstance had any power to disturb the balance of her clear intelligence. With every fibre of her heart she dearly loved Felicitas, and had lavished upon the young girl the treasures of her knowledge and experience,—the results of her true healthy spiritual life,—but not an allusion to the past had ever crossed her lips—it was as sealed a book to-day as it had been nine years before. And Felicitas had just rudely opened the carefully-sealed book,—she reproached herself most bitterly.

"Ah, aunt, forgive me!"—she entreated. How gently beseeching were the tones of this young girl, whom Madame had called—a stick of wood.

The old Mam'selle passed her hand over her eyes.

"Be quiet, child, you did no harm,—but I—I was talking like a childish old woman!" she said, in a choked voice. "Yes, I have grown old, old and feeble! I used to be able to shut my tongue between my teeth, and keep strict watch over it—but I can do it no longer,—'tis time I laid me down to rest."

She held the little gray box still hesitatingly in her hands, as if she were struggling for the courage to execute the sentence of death which she had just pronounced upon it. But after a few minutes, she put it hastily back into



the corner whence she had taken it, and closed the cabinet,—and in doing so she seemed to regain all her former composure. She went back to the round table near the cabinet, where she had been counting the money, and, as if nothing had happened, finished her work.

“Now we will fold the money in a piece of white paper,” she said to Felicitas, and her voice still betrayed inward emotion, “and put it inside the cap—which shall thus contain a blessing even before the little head is put into it,—and Heinrich must be at his post punctually at nine this evening—don’t forget that.”

The old Mam’selle was eccentric—her deeds shunned the light. Like the bat, she grew very active at night, and visited many a haunt of poverty, when the streets were empty and deserted. Heinrich had for years been her right hand—of which the left was unconscious; he distributed Mam’selle’s bounty as slyly as though discovery would cost him his living; and many a poor wretch in the town who gave ear to, and devoutly believed the most monstrous stories concerning her, lived upon the old Mam’selle’s alms. This eccentricity of hers would have been inexplicable to those pious souls who religiously fulfil the Bible injunction: ‘Let your light shine.’

While Aunt Cordula was wrapping up the money, Felicitas opened the glass door which led out upon the gallery. It was the end of May. Ah, how few of those who are never weary of lauding the spring, know how delicious is her coming in the land of Thuringia! There she is no fair-haired exultant child of the south, with wild ecstacy in her veins, in whose footsteps spring up groves of orange and myrtle. Majesty clothes her brow, and upon her lips blooms the serene smile of thoughtful creation. She mixes her colours gravely, and paints her pic-



tures with slow precision—we follow the strokes of her pencil with silent joy—they are not bold and rash, but tender and full of grace. The brownish-green down which clothes the mountain's breast while its crest is still encircled by a snowy crown, she changes gradually and gently to green twigs of May,—the fine network of grass and weeds that covers the brown sods and the meadows dull with last year's growth, she sprinkles with snow-drops and violets like a careful gardener, before she lavishes her wealth of colour upon grove and field. And the breath of her mouth is that bracing air which steels the nerves and sinews of the child of Thuringia, makes his heart sensitive to song, and tenacious of poetic superstitions, preserves his sense of right, often inspires him with a spirit of antagonism, and gives him his naïve, frank nature.

The green strips of cultured land were already seen running down into the valley from the wooded sides of the mountains, like green ribbons. The roughest old knotty pear-tree, as well as the youngest cherry-tree, was surmounted by its wreath of snowy blossoms, an equally youthful face upon each stem,—an impartiality of nature's which man longs in vain to partake of. On the edge of the gallery bloomed hyacinths, May-flowers, and tulips, and at each side of the glass door large syringa and snow-ball bushes were growing in boxes.

Felicitas carried into the music-room the round table and the old Mam-selle's comfortable arm-chair. Upon the table she spread a fresh napkin, and made the coffee in the dainty little service. When the rich odour of the Mocha berry floated out upon the air, the old Mam'selle sat at the table looking upon the landscape lying beneath the genial sun of spring.

Felicitas had taken up her sewing again.



"Aunt," she said after a little pause, emphasizing every word, "he is coming to-morrow."

"So I see, my child, by the papers; the news letter from Bonn says 'Prof. Hellwig will spend two months in Thuringia for the sake of his health.' He has come to be a famous man, Fay."

"Fame comes to him easily enough. His duty can never be made difficult by sympathy with his kind. He can cut into the body or the soul of his patients with equal satisfaction."

The old Mam'selle looked up at the girl with surprise,—this unspeakable bitterness of tone was quite new to her.

"Take care that you are not unjust, my child!" she said slowly, and with extreme gentleness, after a moment's pause.

Felicitas looked up quickly,—her brown eyes were at this moment almost black.

"I should not know how to begin to think otherwise of him," she replied, "he has sinned against me most heavily,—and I know that I should feel no pity for any misfortune that might happen to him,—and if by only raising my finger I could do him a kindness, I know I should never do it."

"Fie!"

"Yes, aunt, this is the truth. I have always shown you a cheerful face up here, because I would not for the world have poisoned the moments that we could spend together. You have often thought me peaceful and quiet in mind, when all was uproar within me. Let yourself be trodden under foot every hour of every day, hear how your parents are scorned as accursed of God, every imagined fault in yourself ascribed to them, be conscious of



continual aspiration after a higher culture, and find yourself degraded with sneers to a position among those to whom culture is unknown because you are poor and have no right to any lofty aspiration, see how your tormentors are surrounded by a halo of piety, and crush out your very soul with the name of God continually upon their lips,—and if you can bear it all quietly, if every drop of blood in your veins does not cry out against such injustice,—yours is no angelic endurance, but the cowardly slavish submission of a weak nature which deserves to be trodden under foot.”

Felicitas spoke quietly, in a clear ringing voice. What power over her exterior this strange young creature possessed! She scarcely moved a finger as the tide of passionate words poured from her lips.

“The thought of being again confronted with that stony face excites me more than I can tell you, aunt. I must now hear that heartless, soulless voice utter all that he has written concerning me for the last nine years. Like some cruel boy who lets a poor bird flutter at the end of a string, he has chained me to this house, and would have converted my uncle’s will into a curse for me. Can anything be more cruel than his treatment of me? It was of course impossible that a player’s child could have any mental capacity, any warmth of heart, any keen sense of honour,—she could atone for her disgraceful parentage only by becoming what they call a handmaiden of the Lord—a wretched being cramped in on every side by the narrowest prejudice.”

“I hope we are something a little better than that, my child,” said Aunt Cordula, with a meaning smile. “At any rate his coming will bring about a final change in your life,” she added more seriously.

“Yes, there will only be a few struggles more. Madame



consoled me to-day with the hope that all will soon be over."

"Then I shall not need repeat to you that you must wait patiently down there, that you may fulfil the last will of one who took you to his home and loved you like his own child. Then you will be entirely free, and can take care of your old aunt openly, without any fear of our being separated from each other,—for no one will have any power to do so."

Felicitas looked up with sparkling eyes,—she took the little withered hand of the old Mam'selle and pressed it to her lips.

"And do not think the worse of me, aunt, now that I have opened my heart to you," she entreated in gentle tones. "I love my kind, I appreciate them highly, and I have been strengthened in my resistance to mental degradation by the hope of being something more among them than a useless beast of burden. If certain among them have ill treated me, I would not for the world accuse the mass. I do not even mistrust them. But I cannot love my enemies, and bless those who curse me. If this is a dark spot in my character I cannot help it—and indeed, aunt, I do not wish to,—for here seems to me to be the boundary line between gentleness and pusillanimity!"

Aunt Cordula did not speak, but gazed thoughtfully at Felicitas. Had there been a time in her own life when to forgive had been impossible, except after heart-searching struggles with herself? She did not continue the conversation, but took up needle and thread, and both sewed until twilight, when a most comfortable bundle was ready for the poor Thienemanns. Snugly packed away in it was the small sum of money for the loan of which the poor carpenter had in vain entreated the 'chosen



of the Lord,' but which he would now unconsciously receive from 'one of the world's people.'

When Felicitas left the old Mam'selle, the party from the garden had returned to the house. She heard little Anna, the young widow's child, laughing and talking, and a loud hammering was going on in the second story. She flew along the corridor leading to the main building. Heinrich was standing on a step-ladder nailing garlands above a door. At sight of Felicitas, he made an odd grimace expressive of anger and contempt, in which, however, there was much dry humour, and gave the nails two or three additional strokes, powerful enough to have broken them to pieces, before he descended from his lofty position.

Little Anna had been gravely holding the ladder that it might not fall; but when she saw Felicitas she forgot her important office, and, tottering feebly towards the young girl, threw her arms caressingly around her knees. Felicitas lifted her from the floor and held her in her arms.

"Shouldn't you think," asked Heinrich, in a vexed undertone, "that we were to have a wedding here to-morrow? and all for a man who will walk in, turning neither to the right nor the left, and will go about all day looking as if he had been drinking vinegar."

He held up the end of one of the garlands: "Just look," he said, "see the forget-me-nots in it. Well, those who put them there, I suppose know why they did it. But, Fay," he interrupted himself suddenly, looking at the child who was pressing her wasted cheek against Felicitas' face, "do me the kindness not to be always taking that wretched child in your arms. There is not a healthy drop of blood in its body. I am sure it cannot be good for you."

Felicitas quickly put her left arm around the little girl



and pressed her closely to her breast. The child hid her face in terror of Heinrich's cross words, so that only her light curls could be seen,—and as the young girl stood there, a more charming picture of a Madonna could not be imagined.

She was upon the point of replying reprovingly, when the garlanded door opened,—it must have been ajar, for it swung slowly wide open, affording a full view of the interior of the room. It was decked as if for a bride—vases full of flowers stood upon the broad sill of its only window—and the Councillor's widow had just festooned a long garland above the writing-table. She was stepping back to observe the effect of her work when she became aware of the group just outside the door. Perhaps the resemblance to a Madonna displeased her, for she knit her brows, and calling to her maid who was dusting the furniture in the room, pointed towards the open door.

“Get down right away, Anna,” said Rosa, hurrying out. “Your mamma always tells you not to let any one take you up and carry you. My mistress does not like,” she continued pertly, turning to Felicitas, “to have Anna petted and kissed by everybody; she does not think it healthy.”

She led the weeping child into the room and closed the door.

“Ah, gracious powers! what people they are!” growled Heinrich, as he went down stairs. “You see what you get by your kindness, Fay! These people think their diseases are as aristocratic as themselves, and you must be grateful to God for permission to lay your healthy hands upon their sickly bodies!”

Felicitas silently descended the stairs by his side. Just as they reached the hall, a carriage rumbled across the Square and stopped at the street door. Before Heinrich



could get to the door, it was thrown wide open. The hall was nearly dark, and only the outline of a tall manly figure could be seen upon the threshold.

In three steps the gentleman reached the door of the sitting-room, which was opened from within. An exclamation of surprise broke from Madame, followed, however, by the cold greeting: "You have grown unpunctual, John, we did not expect you until to-morrow,"—then the door was closed, and the carriage waiting without and the delicate aroma of a fine cigar were all that testified to the arrival.

"It was he!" whispered Felicitas, laying her hand upon her throbbing heart.

"Now for it!" muttered Heinrich, at the same time listening at the foot of the stairs.

The wild huntsman seemed careering above. The Councillor's widow actually flew down the steps, her fair curls waving, and her white dress floating around her like a cloud.

She left Rosa and the limping child far behind her, and quickly entered the sitting-room.

"Aha! Fay,—now we know why those forget-me-nots were so thick in the garland," laughed Heinrich, as he went out to superintend the bringing in of the baggage.

The next morning early, Felicitas took advantage of a leisure moment and slipped up to Aunt Cordula to tell her of the success of Heinrich's errand to the Thienemanns. Upon the landing of the second story, Heinrich came towards her with a grin of delight, as he pointed his thumb over his shoulder at the door above which he had nailed the garland the day before. The decoration had vanished—a heap of wreaths lay upon the floor, and several vases of flowers were ranged there close to the wall.



"They came down in a hurry," whispered Heinrich—"one—two—three good tugs, and down came all the forget-me-nots. I came up just as he was standing on the ladder."

"Who?"

"Why, the Professor. He made a terrible wry face, for I had nailed the things up to last there forever, and he had to tug and pull hard enough. But only think, Fay, he shook hands with me to-day when I bade him good morning! I tell you I was surprised."

Felicitas' lip curled,—a biting comment was upon her tongue,—but she suddenly turned the corner and sped along the corridor, for quick steps within the room were heard approaching the door.

As, some time afterwards, she returned from her visit up-stairs, she heard the gentle voice of the Councillor's widow,—nothing could be more melodious than this woman's voice.

"Ah, the poor flowers!" said she.

"You should not have taken all that trouble for me, Adele," replied a masculine voice,—“you know I never could endure such things.”

It was the same cold voice which had once made such a deep impression upon little Fay,—but the tone was deeper, and was now tinged with vexation. Felicitas stood upon the landing and fairly held her breath while she looked down. There he was, carefully leading Anna step by step down the stairs. There was nothing in his appearance which could suggest his title of Professor. The young girl had always imagined the gifted possessors of this title surrounded by a halo of refinement and culture, but here she looked in vain for the outward and visible sign of such mental grace. She saw a muscular, compactly-built figure, whose angular motions could not



certainly be characterized as elegant, and about which there was an air of cold self-reliance,—it seemed as though, even in courteous greeting, that back could never bend. And there was nothing in the face to contradict the judgment which the figure elicited. For a moment he turned his head, but there was no beauty in the expression of the features which she had connected in her childish imagination with the Evangelist's picture.

A strong, curly, light-brown beard covered the lower part of the face, reaching to the breast, and between the eyebrows—drawn together at this moment with vexation at the be-garlanded room—was a deep wrinkle. But yet, there was something distinguished in the air of manly decision and determined force of will that characterized this unattractive exterior.

And now he stooped down and took the limping child in his arms.

“Come here, my child,—the poor little legs are not strong enough yet to walk easily,” he said. It sounded astonishingly gentle and sympathetic.

“He is not speaking to a player's child,” thought Felicitas, and her heart swelled with bitterness.

The morning was a very noisy one for the quiet house. The bell at the street door rang continually. There were plenty of people in this little town, as well as everywhere else in the world, anxious to bask in the sunshine which stream from any celebrity,—entirely oblivious of how it must illuminate their own insignificance. Their visits were a reprieve to Felicitas, who, much as she longed to have an end put to the life she was leading, shrunk in terror from the impending interview with those whom she so detested. But the tenants of the sitting-room must have been anxious that this same interview should take place as quickly as possible, for scarcely was dinner over



when Heinrich appeared in the kitchen, examined Felicitas' dress most carefully, brushed a little dust from her black sleeve, and said, with anxiety: "Put up that curl that has slipped out just over your ear, Fay,—make it smooth,—the people in there don't like anything out of place, you know. You are to go into my old master's study,—they are there. But what are you afraid of?—you are as pale as ashes. Courage! Fay,—he can't take your head off!"

Felicitas opened the door and stepped gently into her uncle's former study. Her cheeks and lips were still white, and the absence of all colour gave to her features an almost unearthly air of repose.

Just as on that stormy morning nine years ago, Madame sat in the arm-chair at the window. Beside her, with his back turned to the door and his hands crossed behind him, stood the man who had resolutely condemned this young creature to a hard life of servitude, who had done all that lay in his power to close for her the domain of the intellect, and who had been, even when at a distance, always ready to punish without stopping to ask—'Do you really deserve it?'

Felicitas had been right in dreading this interview—for at the sight of him such a flood of bitterness and dislike welled up within her as made self-control almost impossible, and yet she never needed self-control more than at this critical moment.

"Here is Caroline," said Frau Hellwig.

The Professor turned and started with surprise. It had apparently never occurred to him that the player's child, who had stood there stamping her foot like a little fury, might possibly grow up and become quiet and self-contained. It was she, stately and composed, although her eyes sought the ground.



He stepped towards her, and his right arm moved involuntarily,—was he about to give her his hand, as he had done to Heinrich in the morning?

At the thought, her heart throbbed with an access of scorn, and the delicate fingers of the hand which hung immovably at her side closed convulsively upon the palm,—but she raised her eyes, and from under their lashes looked with icy coldness at the man standing opposite to her. It was the gaze with which a bitter enemy meets an opponent. The Professor must have understood it, for he retreated involuntarily, and measured her with his keen glance from head to foot.

At this moment some one knocked at the door, and the Councillor's widow put in her lovely curly head—

“May I come in?” she asked, in a tone of soft entreaty,—and without waiting for an answer she came into the room.

“Ah, I am just in time to hear sentence passed,” she said. “My dear Caroline, you will soon see that there is a stronger will at work here than yours—and poor Wellner will at last be made happy.”

“I beg you, Adele, to let John speak,” cried Madame, ungraciously.

“Well, let this point be settled first,” said the Professor. He crossed his arms upon his chest, and leaned against a table behind him. “Will you tell me why you reject this man's honourable proposals?”

His quiet passionless gaze rested searchingly upon the girl's face.

“Because I despise him. He is a wretched hypocrite, who uses piety as a cloak for avarice and greed of gain,” she replied, with great firmness,—these blows must be parried by quiet, decided frankness.

“Heavens! what a wicked slander!” cried the Council-



lor's widow. In her displeasure she clasped her white hands and looked beseechingly towards heaven, opening wide her large blue eyes. Madame uttered a short contemptuous laugh.

"Now, John, you have a sample of the mind and manner of your precious ward," she cried. "She is quick enough to despise—I can assure you of that. I pray you end this as soon as possible. You can do nothing with her—and I have no mind to hear honest people slandered."

The Professor did not answer. He was stroking his beard with his hand—which was wonderfully white and well shaped—and gazing at the Councillor's widow, who stood there like an adoring seraph. It almost seemed as if he had heard only her exclamation,—the corners of his mouth twitched slightly,—but who could read the meaning of that strange face?

"How eagerly you must have pursued the study of character, Adele, during the few weeks of your stay here," he said. "With such an advocate——"

"But, in Heaven's name! John," the young widow interrupted him,—“you cannot think that I have any particular interest——” She suddenly paused, and a deep blush mounted into her cheeks.

And now decided contempt looked from the Professor's eyes.

"All the ladies who come here—aunt's friends—agree that Wellner is a most excellent man," she said, deprecatingly. "All the missionary funds pass through his hands—and the members of our church have the greatest confidence in him."

"And you naturally rely upon their judgment," concluded the Professor shortly. "I do not know the man," he turned to Felicitas, "and therefore cannot say how far you are justified in your accusation."



"John!" broke in Madame, with excitement.

"Not now, mother,—we will discuss this at some other time, alone together," he said gently and soothingly. "Of course no one will put any force upon you," he continued, turning to Felicitas again. "I have hitherto always maintained my right to enforce any commands laid upon you, in the first place, because I placed implicit confidence in the source whence such commands have proceeded, and, in the second place, because your character is an exaggerated one, and one which always rebels against whatever would conduce to its best good. But in a matter of this kind my power ceases. As far as I know, you are right, for you are young, and he is, as I hear, a man advanced in years, which is unsuitable. Another great objection is the difference of station. At present he overlooks your origin, but a time almost always comes when such a thing is overlooked no longer. A disturbance of the social equilibrium is always productive of unhappiness."

How sensible and how heartless all this sounded!—He was the very embodiment at this moment of all those written instructions from Bonn which had always kept in full view the snare of disgrace from which the 'player's child' had been extricated. He left his former place and stepped up to the girl, whose lips were quivering with a bitter smile—

"You have been a great care to us," he said, raising his forefinger. "You have never known how—and as I am compelled to think,—you have never desired, to gain my mother's approval. As matters stand you can hardly wish to remain in this house any longer."

"I am most desirous of leaving it immediately."

"That I can readily believe,—you have never been at any pains to conceal your dislike of our strict decorous



rule and your impatience under it." There was a mixture of pique and vexation in his voice. "It is indeed trouble lost to attempt to suppress the restless, frivolous inclinations natural to you. Well, you shall have what you desire, but my task is not yet completed. I must first attempt to discover your relatives."

"You had different views upon this point formerly," interrupted Frau Hellwig contemptuously.

"Those views have been changed by time and circumstances, as you see, mother," he replied.

Felicitas was silent, and looked down. She knew that any such attempt would be without result. Aunt Cordula had proved that long ago. For years before she had instituted a search for the juggler, Orlowsky, or any of the relatives of his wife, in the columns of all the principal papers of Germany—but without any success. Of course Felicitas could say nothing of this.

"The necessary steps shall be taken to-day," continued the Professor,—“two months must be consumed in these inquiries. For that space of time you will continue to occupy your position as my ward, and my mother's servant. If by the end of that time, none of your relatives have appeared, then——”

"Then," broke in Felicitas, "at the end of the probation I shall entreat for an entire release from my present bonds."

"Ah, that sounds too harsh!" cried the Councillor's widow angrily. "It would seem as if you had known only ill treatment and oppression in this peaceful Christian household. What ingratitude!"

"You believe, then, that you can do without further assistance from us?" asked the Professor, not heeding the young widow's angry outbreak.

"I am quite sure of it."



"Very well," he said, shortly, after a moment's silence,—"after the lapse of two months you shall be free to go where you choose, and do as you choose." He turned away, and walked to the window.

"You may go," said Madame harshly.

Felicitas left the room.

"Eight weeks more of this struggle!" she whispered, as she went through the hall. "It is for life and death!"

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## CHAPTER XII.

THREE days had passed since the Professor's arrival. The monotonous life in the old merchant's house had undergone a transformation, but the time had, most unexpectedly, passed over Felicitas' head very quietly. She breathed freely, and yet, strange to say, she had never felt more humiliated and wounded than at present. The Professor had not given himself any further trouble concerning her—he had apparently begun and concluded all notice of her in his first interview with her. He had sometimes passed her in the hall without seeing her, indeed, at such times he had seemed very much annoyed, and the expression of annoyance on his countenance by no means beautified it. The cause of this annoyance was Madame's persistence in sending for him to the sitting-room whenever visitors were present who wished to see him. He obeyed her summons, 'tis true, but he must have proved a most silent and unattractive addition to society.

There were visitors every day whom Heinrich conducted up stairs to the second story—patients—often



miserable, poverty-stricken wretches—whom Frederika, at any other time, would have sent roughly from the door,—but to her great vexation, and indeed against Madame's desire, they were now shown up the snowy, freshly-scrubbed stairs to the Professor's room, where they always found admittance and a listener. The Professor had a great reputation as an oculist—he had effected several cures pronounced by some of his distinguished brethren impossible—and thus the young man's name had become widely known and famous.

Frau Hellwig had ordered Felicitas to attend to the sweeping and dusting of her son's room. The little apartment presented a changed aspect since it had received a tenant,—whereas it had once possessed a pleasant air of comfort, it now looked like the cell of a bare-footed friar. The gay chintz curtains had shared a kindred fate with the garlands,—they had been sacrificed to the Professor's love of light,—several coarse, brilliantly-coloured battle pieces which had adorned the walls had been removed, and instead, just above the writing-table, hung a copper-plate engraving, rescued from some dark corner of the house,—an exquisite picture of a young mother wrapping her child tenderly in her own fur-lined cloak. The woollen cover of the table, and several embroidered cushions had been banished because they collected the dust, and upon another table, instead of the Parian statuettes which had formerly adorned the room, were most symmetrically arranged the Professor's books. No curled leaves, no frayed corners, were to be found among them, and yet they had been well used. The bindings were excessively simple—and the colour of the back was an index to the language in which the book was written,—gray indicated the Latin tongue, brown the German, &c. “Exactly so he would like to arrange human beings,” thought Felici-



tas bitterly, when she saw the books for the first time,—  
“and woe to the one who is discontented with his colour!”

In the morning the Professor drank his coffee with his mother and the Councillor's widow,—then he retired to his room and studied until noon. He refused from the first the wine which Madame sent up for his refreshment, but a decanter of water was always placed upon his table. He seemed to have a repugnance to being waited upon,—he never used the bell. When the water in the decanter was no longer fresh he took the vessel down stairs and filled it himself.

On the morning of the fourth day letters arrived for the Professor. Heinrich had gone out, and Felicitas was sent up-stairs with them. She lingered at the door, for some one was speaking in the room, a woman's voice was just finishing, as it seemed, some long narration.

“Dr. Boehm spoke to me about your son's eyes,” said the Professor kindly,—“I will see what can be done for them.”

“Ah, gracious Herr Professor, such a famous man as you——”

“I must have none of that, my good woman,”—he interrupted her so harshly, that she stopped, terrified. “I will come to-morrow and examine his eyes,” he added, more gently.

“But we are such poor people,—we cannot afford——”

“My good woman, you have said that twice before,” interrupted the Professor, somewhat impatiently. “Pray go now—I really have no more time. If I can help your son I certainly will. Good-by!”

The woman came out, and Felicitas entered the room. The Professor sat at his writing-table, his pen was already rapidly traversing the paper. But he had seen the young girl enter, and without lifting his eyes from his



work, stretched out his left hand for the letters. He broke the seal of one while Felicitas was returning to the door.

"By-the-way," he asked, without looking up from his letter, "who dusts this room?"

"I do," replied the young girl, standing still.

"Well then I must request you to have a little more regard for my writing-table. It is very annoying to me not to find upon it the book which I want, and there is one now I cannot find."

Felicitas stepped composedly up to the table upon which were several piles of books.

"What is the title of the book?" she inquired.

Something like a smile broke over the Professor's serious features. Such a question in his study from girlish lips sounded strange and naïve to the grave physician.

"You will scarcely be able to find it—it is a French book,—'Cruveilhier, Anatomie du Système Nerveux' is printed upon the back," he added with something like another smile.

Felicitas immediately drew out a volume from under a pile of other French books.

"Here it is," she said, "it lay just where you yourself put it—I never take up one of these books."

The Professor rested his left elbow upon the table, and turning hastily round, looked the young girl full in the face.

"Do you understand French?" he demanded.

Felicitas was frightened; she had betrayed herself. She not only understood French, but spoke it with ease and fluency. The old Mam'selle had been a most thorough instructress. She must reply, and reply immediately. The steel gray eyes gazed fixedly at her face,—



they would detect the slightest prevarication, the truth must be told.

"I have had lessons in French," she answered.

"Oh, yes, I remember, you studied until you were nine years old,—you have retained something of your lessons," he said, thoughtfully, rubbing his forehead with his hand.

Felicitas did not speak.

"And this was the unfortunate circumstance that made my mother's and my plans for you so utterly futile,—you had learned too much already,—and because we entertained our own peculiar views upon the subject, you detest us as your oppressors, tormentors, and Heaven knows what beside. Do you not?"

For one moment Felicitas struggled with herself, but her bitterness of soul conquered. The colour left her lips, and she said coldly: "I certainly have every reason to do so."

A frown of displeasure gathered upon his forehead, but perhaps he remembered how often, as a physician, he had been obliged to listen calmly to all kinds of fretful unkind replies from his patients. This young girl was mentally ill, he thought, and he only remarked with composure: "Well, I certainly from this moment acquit you entirely of the want of frankness of which you are accused. You are more than candid. For the rest we shall be able to console ourselves, in spite of the bad opinion you entertain of us."

He took up his letter again, and Felicitas left the room. As she stood upon the threshold of the open door, he glanced once more after her. The landing without was flooded with golden sunshine—the girl's form as she left the darker room stood out like a painting upon a golden background. Her figure had not yet attained to that



ripeness of perfection which a few years would bring,—but every outline was indescribably tender, and every movement full of grace, of that supple ease which fairy lore ascribes to the heroines of its legends. And what wonderful hair! It would usually have been called chestnut-brown, but when as now touched by the sunshine, it shimmered like red gold. It was not like that soft yellow hair which had fallen in such sparkling waves from under the helmet of the juggler's beautiful wife. It was not yet very long,—but of immense thickness, and was with difficulty confined in a large knot at the back of the head. A rebellious curl would often as at present break loose from its bounds, and lie upon the white neck, just below the knot.

The Professor turned to his work again, but the train of thought which had been first interrupted by the poor woman's account of her son's eyes, would not be pursued. He rubbed his forehead with an air of vexation, and drank a glass of water,—it was of no use. At last, out of humour with so many interruptions, he took up his hat and went down stairs. If the Saracen's head in bronze, which had occupied the respectable position of penwiper to its learned master for so many years, could have opened its grinning mouth wider, it would certainly have done so with astonishment,—there lay the pen unwiped; the Saracen might long in vain for the accustomed delight of polishing the inky point upon its well-worn dress. Incredible! Its exact master must have been greatly disturbed.

“Mother,” he said, as he passed by the door of her room, “pray, in future, do not send that young girl up to me upon any errand,—let Heinrich come,—if he is not here at the moment, I can wait.”

‘Aha!’ replied Madame, in a tone of triumph ‘In



the course of three days the girl has become intolerable to you. Think what you have condemned me to for nine long years."

Her son shrugged his shoulders without speaking, and turned to go.

"The instruction that she was receiving at the time of my father's death ceased entirely when she entered the parish school, did it not?" he asked, looking back.

"What a silly question, John!" said his mother, with vexation. "I am sure I wrote you minutely enough upon that subject, and told you distinctly all about it when I saw you in Bonn. The school-books were sold, and the exercise-books I burned myself."

"And who have been her associates?"

"Associates? Why, she has had none but Heinrich and Frederika; she would have none." The cruel expression appeared on Madame's features; her upper lip contracted as it used to do, showing one of the upper teeth. "I could not undergo the annoyance of having her sit at my table and in my room," she continued. "I could see in her only the cause of coldness and dissension between your father and myself,—and besides, each year she has become more disagreeable to me. But I tried to induce her to associate with two or three pious girls,—daughters of some of our truly Christian mechanics,—and you yourself know how entirely she refused to have anything to do with them, declaring that they were wolves in sheep's clothing, or something of the kind. Oh, you'll find out much in the course of these eight weeks with which you have burdened yourself."

The Professor left the house to take a long walk.

On the afternoon of the same day Madame had invited several ladies, most of them strangers visiting the baths, to take coffee in the garden outside the town. Frederika



was suddenly taken ill, wherefore Felicitas was sent to prepare everything for the guests. Her arrangements were soon concluded. Upon the smooth gravel in the shade of a high cypress wall stood the delicately ordered table, and in the kitchen of the summer-house in the garden the hot water was simmering over the fire, all ready to be converted into delicious coffee. Felicitas leaned against the open bow-window in the summer-house, and looked out in melancholy mood. Without, everything was as green and blooming in the quiet fragrant air as though no desolating autumn blast had ever swept through the branches of the trees, no wintry frost spun its glittering network over the shrubs and plants. And years before everything had been just as bright and fresh—delighting the eyes of him whose warm kindly heart had now mouldered away in the ground,—whose protecting helping hand had been stretched out wherever there was work for it to do,—among his flowers and plants as well as among his suffering fellow-men. The tender young flowers all around smiled as brightly into the faces of strangers, and he was forgotten. Hither he had brought the little orphan girl out of the reach of unkind tongues, not only in summer, but often in the early spring, when winter was resigning his sceptre reluctantly, and with many a struggle. A fire had been lighted in the summer-house, a warm carpet spread upon the floor, and they had passed many a cosy delicious hour here, when the swelling buds outside tapped against the warm window panes, upon which an obstinate snow-flake would melt into a trickling tear,—and through which, across the yet desolate garden, could be seen the dear old mountain, half covered with snow, wearing its familiar crown of poplars. Ah, what precious memories these were! And just opposite were the chestnuts,—their luxuriant young



leaves not yet fully grown, hanging idly down, as though enervated by the golden sunlight.

Approaching footsteps and the creaking of the garden gate startled Felicitas from her melancholy reverie. Through the north window she perceived the Professor just entering the garden accompanied by another gentleman. They walked slowly in the direction of the summer-house. John's companion was now a frequent visitor at Madame's,—he was the son of a man who had been a dear friend of Herr Hellwig's. Of like age with the Professor, he also had been educated by the strict and orthodox relative of the Hellwigs on the Rhine. Both had been fellow-students at the University for a short time, and, although widely different in character and mode of life, they had always been friends. While John Hellwig had attained his professorial chair almost immediately after completing his University course, young Franz had spent his time in travelling until very recently, when, at his parents' desire, he had returned to Germany, passed his legal examinations, and was now a lawyer here, in his native town, patiently awaiting cases and clients.

Upon a nearer view, he was seen to possess great personal beauty,—his form was elastic and vigorous,—his features were intellectual and expressive. His classically-shaped head, with the delicate Greek profile, might have seemed almost feminine in outline, had not the masculine grace of carriage, the strength and vigour of movement, which characterized its possessor, fully redeemed it from any such charge.

He took the cigar from his lips, examined it for a moment, and then tossed it aside. The Professor produced his cigar-case and handed it to him.

“Oh, not for the world!” cried his friend, putting up his hands with a comical gesture of refusal. “How could



I dream of robbing those miserable little heathen in the Sandwich Islands,—and Heaven knows where else beside!”

The Professor smiled.

“As far as I know,” continued the other, “you have persevered until now in the heroic work of self-renunciation which you initiated ten years ago. I remember you allowed yourself three cigars a day, but you only smoked one, and devoted the worth in money of the other two to the missionary fund.”

“I have preserved the habit,” said his friend, with a quiet smile,—“but the money is differently appropriated,—it all belongs to my needy patients.”

“Impossible! you—the sturdy, determined defender of all pious projects for the salvation of the heathen!—the foremost among the pupils of our despot on the Rhine! Is this your devotion to his precepts? Apostate!”

The Professor shrugged his shoulders. He paused, and thoughtfully brushed the ashes from the end of his cigar.

“As a physician, my views of mankind and of my duties to them as an individual have undergone a radical change,” said he. “I could not hope even imperfectly to fulfil my desire to be of some use in the world without forgetting and unlearning much.”

They walked on, and their voices died away. But the sun lay hot and scorching upon the gravel path down which they slowly wandered, and instinctively they turned back to the stone-paved walk near the house, which was sheltered by the thick foliage of a group of acacias.

“It is of no use,” Felicitas heard the Professor say rather more quickly than was his wont. “You cannot change me in this. I am just as much bored in the society of women now as I used to be years ago, and, to tell you the truth, my intercourse as a physician with the fair sex,



as it is called, has by no means tended to modify my former opinions with regard to them. What a combination of frivolity and want of character !”

“Of course you are bored in women’s society,” Franz declared, pausing beneath the bow-window. “You diligently seek the society only of the most ignorant and simple, not to say silly, women. You detest modern female education, sometimes ’tis true with some show of reason. I am not going to defend ignorant strumming of the keys of a piano, or silly, broken French, but there is another side to the question. At the present time, when the masculine intellect is continually exploring new and untried paths, enjoying and participating in the impetus which science of all kinds has received in this century, you wish, if possible, to confine women behind the barriers placed before them during the middle ages—to deny their intellectual power a wider range than is accorded to their servants—this is not only unjust, but pure folly. Why, women have the souls of your sons in their hands, and at a time, too, when they are most easily influenced, pliable as wax, ready to receive impressions which they will retain with the tenacity of iron. Incite women to serious thought, enlarge the circle in which you, egotist that you are, have confined them, and which you call ‘feminine vocations,’ and you will soon see vanity and want of character disappear.”

“That course I shall most certainly not pursue, my dear friend!” said the Professor sarcastically, and slowly walked on a few steps.

“I know perfectly well that you differ from me. You think every requirement for a wife and mother can be fulfilled by a religious woman. My revered Professor, I, too, would choose a religious wife. A woman without religion is a flower without fragrance. But I pray you, take care



You think her notable, well brought up, and *religious*, and while you leave all things to her in charge with an easy conscience, a tyranny is established in your home, against which you would rebel instantly were it not exercised by so *religious* a woman. Behind the mask of religion are too often concealed the evil tendencies which peculiarly beset the feminine nature. One can, even in the smallest sphere, be cruel, revengeful, and haughtily disdainful,—condemning and destroying in blind zeal much that is beautiful and elevating,—all in the name of the Lord, and in what is called the interest of the kingdom of God.”

“You go very far.”

“Not too far. I know you will come to see that the intellectual capacity must be refined and cultivated, and the soul made open to the claims of humanity, before the religion of a woman can have the beneficent power that it should have in the world.”

“These are, at all events, considerations that I have no inclination to pursue,” rejoined the Professor coldly. “Science so entirely engrosses me and my life——”

“Aha! and *she*?”—his friend interrupted him in a low tone, pointing towards the entrance of the garden. There behind the grating appeared the Councillor’s widow, with her child and Madame. “Is she not the actual realization of your ideal?” he continued with undisguised irony. “Simple,—she dresses always in white muslin,—which, by-the-way, is extremely becoming to her,—religious,—who can doubt it who has seen her in church with her lovely blue eyes cast up to Heaven? She detests all science, study, and meditation, because they would hinder the progress of her knitting or embroidery. She is your equal in rank, which you know is also one of your indis-



pensable requisitions for a happy marriage,—in short, every one supposes that she is the one destined——”

“You are ill natured, and never liked Adele,” interrupted the Professor hastily. “And I am afraid it is because her father was such a strick disciplinarian. She is sweet tempered, gentle, and an excellent mother.”

He walked slowly towards the ladies, who were approaching, and saluted them courteously.

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### CHAPTER XIII.

BEFORE long the garden walks were enlivened by graceful female figures, who, dressed in muslins and gauzes, hovered about like white summer clouds. The stiff dark cypress wall, before which the table was spread, made a charming background for the airy fluttering figures; silvery laughter and gay feminine conversation floated out upon the air, diversified now and then by sonorous manly voices. The guests were soon all assembled around the table, and the ladies produced their embroidery.

At a sign from Madame, Felicitas approached the table with the coffee-tray.

“My motto is ‘simple and cheap,’” she heard the Councillor’s widow say, as she drew near. “In summer I never wear a dress that costs more than three thalers.”

“But you forget, my dear,” said a rather over-dressed young lady, looking suspiciously at the other’s boasted simple attire, “that you trim this simple material with quantities of insertion and edging, which certainly must



increase the price of the dress to three times its original cost."

"Ah, who would think of prosaic thalers in connection with this lovely floating stuff!" cried Franz, enjoying the malicious glances which the two ladies were interchanging. "It looks airy enough to waft the wearers to heaven, were it not for—yes, were it not for such heavy golden bracelets as that one for example, which must inevitably drag its fair possessor to earth again."

As he spoke his eyes rested with evident interest upon the wrist of the Councillor's widow, who was sitting very near him, but who, upon his last remark, started involuntarily, while for a moment a deep blush suffused her cheeks and brow.

"Do you know, most gracious lady," he said, "that for the last half hour I have been irresistibly attracted by your bracelet? It is of such superb antique workmanship. My curiosity is especially excited by the inscription that I can just distinguish, surrounded by that charming wreath."

The countenance of the young widow had regained its usual lovely colour,—she raised her placid blue eyes, quietly unclasped the bracelet, and handed it to him.

Felicitas was standing just behind young Franz. She could distinctly see the bracelet which he held. Oddly enough it was in every respect exactly similar to the one lying in the old Mam'selle's secret drawer, except that it was much smaller—indeed it was rather tight for the young widow's wrist.

das ir liebe ist âne kranc  
Die hât got jesamme geben  
ûf ein wûnneclichez leben,

read Franz, with fluency. "Strange!" he cried, "the



verse has no beginning. Oh, I remember it, it is a quotation from one of the old Minnesingers—a verse from Ulrich von Lichtenstein's 'Constant Love,'—the whole verse is translated—

Where'er love with love requited  
Dwells in two hearts fond and true,  
And where both are so united  
That this love is always new,  
God to these two hearts has given  
Bliss indeed, for love is heaven.

"This bracelet has doubtless a faithful companion closely connected with it by the beginning of the verse," he remarked, with lively interest. "Does its companion not belong to you also?"

"No," replied the Councillor's widow, as she bent over her embroidery, while the bracelet was passed from hand to hand around the circle.

"And where did you get such a remarkable and exquisite piece of workmanship, Adele?" asked the Professor, across the table.

Again the young widow blushed slightly.

"Papa made me a present of it a little while ago," she answered. "Heaven only knows how far back its antiquity can be traced!"

She took the ornament, clasped it upon her wrist, and turning to the lady next her, addressed a remark to her which effectually changed the current of conversation.

While universal attention had been occupied with the interesting bracelet, Felicitas had made the round of the table—every one had been helped from her tray without bestowing a glance upon the person who carried it. She was returning to the summer-house entirely unobserved. At the request of little Anna, who was limping



about in the shady walk in front of the house, she stopped for a moment, and lifting her arms, and bending back her head, caught at one of the hanging boughs of an acacia, and tried to break off a small branch for the child. For a female figure faultless in outline, there is no more advantageous position than the one thus taken unconsciously, and which she retained for several moments. Young Franz hastily raised his eyeglass—he was slightly near-sighted,—and his dark eyes were riveted with evident astonishment upon the youthful form beneath the acacia; he was in his turn keenly observed by the Councillor's widow, although she was apparently absorbed in her embroidery. When Felicitas disappeared within the house Franz dropped his eyeglass and was turning to Madame, evidently with a question upon his tongue, when the young widow interposed with some inquiry concerning an accident which he had met with while travelling, thus enlisting his attention upon a subject in which he was, of course, much interested.

Soon afterwards she arose noiselessly, and went across to the summer-house.

“Dear Caroline,” she said, entering the kitchen, “there is no necessity for your bringing out more coffee. F’ill up the coffee-pot,—I see here is an excellent coffee warmer,—and I will carry it across to the table and pour it out myself—it will be more convenient for our guests, and, to tell you the truth, you are not fit to be seen in that faded chintz dress. How can you come into the presence of gentlemen in that ugly short skirt? It is scarcely decent—do you not see it yourself, child?”

The despised skirt was the best which Felicitas possessed—her holiday-dress. It was certainly worn and faded, but it was faultlessly clean, and smoothly ironed. That she should be reproved for what she had silently and



uncomplainingly submitted to made her smile bitterly,—but any word of self-justification would have been superfluous, and in this case ridiculous.

When the young widow returned to the table, she found the conversation which she had tried to prevent in full play.

“Strikingly beautiful?” repeated Madame, laughing discordantly. “Fie, my dear Franz, I cannot believe you think so. *Striking*, I grant you, but not in a way that is becoming to any young girl. Look closer at that pale face and odd hair. That forward manner, those careless gestures—the eyes which stare you in the face with such unblushing boldness, are all inherited from an incorrigibly depraved mother.—Like begets like—let the root be rotten and the bush will show it. Oh, I know it well—for nine long years I have spared no pains in endeavouring to reclaim this soul to the Lord—but the obstinate girl has defied and defeated all my efforts!”

“Ah, dear aunt, it will soon be over,” said the Councilor’s widow, soothingly, as she was pouring out the coffee. “Only a few weeks longer, and she will leave your house forever. I am indeed afraid that the good seed has fallen upon stony ground. There can be no pious aspirations in a soul which has always ungratefully rebelled against the restraint imposed by strict morality and decorous customs. But still we who are fortunate in being well born should not judge her too severely; there is levity in her blood. If you should travel again in future years, Herr Franz,” she said, jestingly, to the young man, “you may one day chance to meet with this former member of aunt’s household beneath strange skies—and admire her as an ornament to the tight-rope or the circus.”

“She does not look in the least like it,” said the Professor suddenly, in a clear, decided voice. Until now he



had been remarkably silent, his dissenting remark was, of course, most striking. Madame turned towards him surprised and angry, and the young widow lost her stereotyped gentleness, but, nevertheless, she shook her curls with a smile, and opened her lips—in the act, of course, of saying something kind and loving—when she was prevented by the loud cries of her little girl. She turned, and at the sight which met her eyes, uttered a shrill shriek of horror. The child was running towards her mother as steadily as her poor little limbs would allow her—in her right hand she held tightly clasped in her terror a box of lucifer matches—her dress was in flames. We have said that the mother uttered a shriek of terror;—with one glance downward at the light inflammable material of which her own dress was composed, her presence of mind forsook her. She stretched out her arms, as if to defend herself from her child, and, with a leap, vanished behind the protecting cypress wall. The airily dressed ladies scattered like frightened doves in every direction with shrieks of terror. Madame alone bravely followed the two gentlemen to the child's assistance, but they were too late, Felicitas was already upon the spot—she wrapped her dress tightly around the child and tried to smother the flames—but they were too strong, the thin chintz dress caught fire, the young girl was in imminent danger.

With hasty but quiet decision, she seized the child in her arms, ran across the lawn, up the side of the dam, and plunged into the swollen brook.

The deadly peril and the swift rescue had occupied but very few moments; before the two gentlemen had even divined her purpose as she flew past them, the fire was extinguished—they reached the dam just as Felicitas had regained her footing, and, with the child held on her right



arm, was seizing upon the bough of a hazel bush with her left hand, that she might steady herself against the rush of water which was quite violent just at this spot. With the gentlemen, the Councillor's widow also appeared upon the dam.

"My child!—my Anna! Save my child!" she cried, in accents of despair. She really seemed about to run into the water.

"Don't wet your feet, Adele, you might catch cold," said the Professor to her, with cutting irony, as he quickly descended the side of the dam, and from the bank of the stream extended both hands to Felicitas; but they fell at his side again, for the hitherto quiet expression on the girl's face underwent a sudden transformation, the deep wrinkle appeared between her eyebrows, and she cast upon him that deadly cold, hostile glance which he already knew. Turning away her head, she gave little Anna into his arms, and then accepting, with a faint smile of acknowledgment, the hand which Franz extended to her, she sprang upon the dam.

The Professor carried the child into the summer-house, accompanied by its distressed mother, and there it underwent a thorough examination for the purpose of discovering its probable injuries, but, strange to say, it had escaped almost unhurt—no burns were found except on the left hand, where, as the weeping child now related, the mischief had originated. The little girl, while her mother was in the kitchen, had taken the box of matches from the table—as she was lighting one in the garden outside a piece of linen which had been tied around her finger for some trifling scratch, caught fire; she tried to wipe off the flame upon the skirt of her dress, and thus the disaster had occurred.

The terrified ladies now one and all returned. Sympa-



thy for the mother and rescued child and congratulations resounded from all sides, and the 'little angel' was loaded with caresses.

"But, my dear Caroline," said the Councillor's widow, in a tone of gentle reproof to the young girl who stood near her, anxiously awaiting the result of the examination,—“could not you have taken some care of Anna when she was playing in the garden?”

The reproach was too unjust.

"You had a few moments before forbidden me to leave the house," replied Felicitas coldly,—a blush of vexation rose to her cheek, and she looked fixedly at her reprover.

"Indeed,—and what was that for, Adele?" asked Frau Hellwig, in some surprise.

"Heavens! aunt," replied the young widow, without any sign of embarrassment,—“you can easily understand it if you will look at that hair. I wished to spare her and ourselves the shame of the impression which such neglect must produce.”

Felicitas hastily put up her hands to her head; she was conscious of having arranged her hair with great care,—but the comb, which could never be made to sit firmly among the rebellious waves, had slipped out,—it was probably lying at the bottom of the brook. The wondrous loosened masses lay thick upon her shoulders with shining drops of water scattered like pearls here and there among them.

"Is this all the gratitude that you display to the hand which has carried your child unharmed through fire and water, most gracious lady?" asked the young lawyer, with some feeling. Until now he had been gazing at Felicitas.

"How can you do me such injustice, Herr Franz?" remonstrated the young widow, much offended. "How in-



comprehensible to a man are the workings of maternal tenderness! At first the mother involuntarily turns with reproach towards any one who has caused misfortune to her child by neglect, although she thankfully admits that such neglect is atoned for by its subsequent rescue. My dear Caroline," she turned to the young girl, "I shall never forget what you have done for me to-day. I wish I could prove my gratitude to you upon the spot!" Then, as if yielding to a sudden impulse, she unclasped the bracelet from her wrist and held it out to the young girl. "Take this, I beg of you, I value it highly, but what is any sacrifice worth in comparison with my little daughter's preservation?"

Felicitas, deeply wounded, repelled the hand which would have placed the ornament upon her arm.

"I thank you," she said, with that haughty motion of her head which her pious employers found so indescribably unbecoming in the player's child. "I could never receive a reward for fulfilling a simple duty to a fellow-creature, still less do I feel inclined to accept any sacrifice. You say that I have simply atoned for neglect, and therefore, Madame, you can be under no obligations to me."

Frau Hellwig had already taken the bracelet from the Councillor's widow.

"What are you thinking of, Adele?" she said, with some vexation,—"what could the girl do with such a thing as this? Give her a dress of good strong gingham that will be of some service to her, and that will be quite enough!"

When she had finished speaking, the young lawyer left the room. He went for his hat, and came up to the open window, against which Felicitas was leaning.

"I think that we are one and all behaving most cruelly



to you!" he said to her. "In the first place, we insult you by the offer of paltry gold, and then let you stand there in your wet clothes. I am going to hurry to the town and send out everything that is necessary for you and the little incendiary."

He bowed and departed.

"He is a fool!" said Frau Hellwig angrily to the ladies around, who were looking with ill-concealed regret after his retreating figure.

The Professor, busied with the child's examination, had not lost a single word of the foregoing conversation; and one standing near him would have seen how, from the moment when the young widow had offered the bracelet to Felicitas, his features had been suffused by a deep flush. Certainly, as a physician, he would find no favour with ladies,—he was not at all adapted to the study of those wonderfully refined and subtle ailments to which the feminine nature is so liable. He was frightfully straightforward in his dealings with the fair sex. It was so natural that all present should have been frightened nearly to death by the child's deadly peril, and should heap question upon question that they might be assured of its safety, and satisfied as to the probable consequences,—yet to these questions, put in tones of such touching sensibility and sympathy, he returned only the shortest, driest answers—nay, to one or two fair ones, who were most tenderly solicitous, he actually replied with sarcasm.

At last, wrapping the child in a thick warm shawl, he left her to the tender care which all were waiting to bestow upon her, and walked towards the door. Felicitas had retired to the farthest corner of the room; there she thought herself entirely free from observation. With her shoulders slightly contracted, she was leaning against the wall, her face was deadly pale, and the fixed expres-



sion of her dark eyes and her compressed lips showed that she was suffering acute physical pain. She had a considerable burn upon her arm which was smarting most severely.

As he was closing the door behind him, the Professor glanced once more searchingly around the room, his gaze encountered Felicitas,—he paused—looked fixedly at her for a moment, and then approached her hurriedly.

“Are you in pain?” he asked quickly.

“I can bear it,” she replied, with trembling lips which closed again convulsively.

“You are burnt?”

“Yes, on my arm.” Spite of her suffering she wished to repulse all assistance, and turned away her head towards the window. She would not for the world meet those eyes which since her childhood she had so dreaded. He hesitated for a moment, but the sense of his duty as a physician conquered.

“Will you not allow me to help you?” he asked, very slowly, and with great gentleness.

“I will not trouble you,” she coldly replied. “I can do everything for myself as soon as I go back to town.”

“As you please,” he said. “But I would have you remember that my mother still has some claim upon your time and strength. For which reason you should not wilfully make yourself ill.” While he spoke this last sentence he avoided looking at Felicitas.

“I do not forget that,” she answered, with less feeling, —she understood perfectly well that he had reminded her of her duties, not to humiliate her in any way, but evidently to induce her to accept of his surgical aid. “I thoroughly understand my position here,” she added, “and you will find me till the last moment at the post assigned me.”



"Well, is your medical skill required here, John?" asked the Councillor's widow, approaching them.

"No," he said curtly, "but what are you doing here still, Adele? I told you before that Anna should be taken into the fresh air, and I cannot imagine why you insist upon keeping her shut up in this close room."

He went out of the door, and the young widow taking her child in her arms, and accompanied by the rest of the ladies, followed him. Madame was already seated quietly again at the table. Since the last row of her knitting had been completed, the lives of two human beings had trembled in the scale between time and eternity, but such a circumstance had no power to disturb the balance of mind which was the result of iron nerves and a determined will.

At last Heinrich appeared with the necessary garments. The honest fellow had run so fast that the perspiration stood in beads upon his forehead.

Shortly afterward Rosa came to the garden, and Frau Hellwig allowed Felicitas to return to the town. She knew that Aunt Cordula had in her well-stocked medicine-chest a most excellent salve for burns, and therefore while Heinrich kept watch below, she hastened up to the rooms under the roof. While the old Mam'selle, much shocked, brought out the cooling ointment and tenderly bound up the burnt arm, Felicitas related the whole occurrence. She spoke quickly and nervously. Physical pain and agitation of mind had excited her feverishly. Yet the girl's strong will subdued her passionate excitement, until Aunt Cordula gently observed that she ought not to have rejected John's medical aid, and then the last barrier of her carefully preserved self-control was swept away.

"No, aunt!" she cried suddenly, "his hand shall never



touch me, even to save me from instant death. The class to which by birth I belong is 'unspeakably odious to him.' That declaration from his lips once wounded my childish heart mortally, I shall never forget it. To-day his sense of duty as a physician overcame for a moment his aversion to the Pariah. I require and will accept no such sacrifice from him!"

She stopped exhausted, and showed in her face the pain which her arm was giving her.

"He is not without compassion," she continued after a pause, "I know that he denies himself luxuries for the sake of his poor patients. In any other man constant self-denial and quiet kindness would have power to touch me deeply, but here they excite me as the knowledge of crime in another would. I know how mean and degrading an admission this is, aunt, I know it well, but I cannot help it—it causes me great pain, it makes me very angry to see anything admirable in the man whom I shall detest to all eternity!"

And now having entirely lost for the moment her firm foothold of reserve and self-control, she complained for the first time most bitterly of the heartless conduct of the young widow. That peculiar hectic glow faintly appeared on the old Mam'selle's cheek.

"No wonder—is she not Paul Hellwig's daughter?"—she interposed. There was the sternest disapproval expressed in these few words uttered gently but most decisively. Felicitas listened with surprise. Never before had Aunt Cordula made the faintest allusion to any member of the Hellwig family,—she had received the news of the arrival of the Councillor's widow in silence and with apparent utter indifference, so that Felicitas had concluded that she had never in her life had any intercourse with the family upon the Rhine.



"Frau Hellwig calls him one of the chosen of the Lord, an unwearied labourer in the vineyard of the true faith," the young girl said, with some hesitation, after a short pause. "He must be a stern devotee; one of those zealots who live strictly according to the letter, and feel themselves justified in judging harshly the failings and faults of their fellow-men."

Felicitas heard here a strange low laugh. The old Mam'selle's features were of that peculiar kind concerning which it never occurs to us to ask, 'Are they ugly or beautiful?' The refreshing expression of feminine gentleness, and the delicacy of an intellectual nature mediate between the stern requirements of the laws of beauty and the irregularity of nature,—where the line of beauty fails expression completes the effect—but for this very reason, this style of face grows almost unrecognizable, as soon as its accustomed harmony is disturbed. At this moment Aunt Cordula looked positively uncanny; her laugh was a laugh of scorn, although low and smothered, there was something Medusa-like in the look of bitterness and contempt which for one instant swept across her face, usually so quiet and loving. This low laugh with the strange change in the old Mam'selle's face, threw for one moment a faint reflex light upon her past life, but no guiding thread appeared in the dark web, and she now exerted herself to destroy any impression which her momentary self-forgetfulness might have made upon Felicitas.

Upon the large round table in the centre of the room lay several open portfolios. Felicitas well knew the sheets and slips of paper that were scattered about upon the table. Many an illustrious name—Handel, Glück, Haydn and Mozart—was inscribed, often in almost unintelligible hieroglyphics, upon those yellow pages—it



was Aunt Cordula's autographic collection of celebrated composers. When Felicitas entered the room the old Mam'selle had been arranging papers, which, having lain year after year behind the glass doors of the antique cabinet, exhaled a strong odour of mould. She now quietly went on with her work, putting the papers most carefully away in the portfolios. The table was gradually cleared, and a thick book of manuscript music appeared. Upon the title-page was written: "Music for the operetta of 'The wisdom of the magistracy in the institution of breweries,' by Johann Sebastian Bach."

The old Mam'selle laid her finger significantly upon the name of the composer: "You have never seen that before, have you, Fay?" she asked, with a melancholy smile. "That has been lying for many years in the top drawer of my secret cabinet. This morning all sorts of thoughts have been chasing each other through my old brain—their meaning being that it is time to prepare for my going home, and among my preparations this book belongs in the red portfolio. It is the only copy in existence, and is well worth its weight in gold, my dear Fay.

"The libretto of this operetta, written expressly for our little town of X——, in the dialect of the place, was discovered nearly twenty years ago, and created some stir in the musical world on account of the music belonging to it which was supposed to have been composed by Bach—but which was nowhere to be found. This composition, for which search is still made, lies here. These melodies, which have been sleeping here upon paper for more than a century, are for musicians a sort of Nibelungen treasure, especially as they are the only genuine opera airs that Bach ever composed. In 1705, the scholars of the public school here, and some of the towns' folk,



brought out the operetta, and it was played in the old town-hall."

She turned over the title-page, and upon the other side was written in a delicate hand, 'The MS. composition of Johann Sebastian Bach, written by his own hand, and received from him as a remembrance, in the year 1707. Gottheif v. Hirschsprung.' "He sung in the operetta," she said in a voice that vibrated audibly, pointing to the last name.

"And now did this book come into your possession, aunt?"

"It was a legacy," replied Aunt Cordula shortly, almost harshly, as she put the partitur into the red portfolio.

At such moments it was quite impossible to continue a conversation which the old Mam'selle wished to break off. There was at these times such a decided and dignified reserve expressed in every line and motion of the feeble little figure that only utter want of tact and impertinent curiosity could proceed. Felicitas cast a longing glance at the vanishing MSS., the melodies which no one living except Aunt Cordula possessed excited in her the intensest interest, but she did not venture to ask for a sight of them, as she had also previously refrained in her account of the afternoon's occurrences from all mention of the bracelet; for the world she would not for the second time have touched a chord in her kind friend's memory which vibrated so painfully.

The old Mam'selle opened the glass doors, and Felicitas stepped out upon the balcony. The sun was setting. Over the distant landscape hovered what seemed like sparkling floating golden dust, dazzling the eye and mingling the indistinct outlines upon the horizon of earth and heaven. Like grain flung from the hand of the sower, long rays of



light were flung from the setting sun, tipping with ruddy gold the summits of the mountain forests and the blossom-laden orchards in the valley. Single sections of country stood out revealed by the fading rays amid the gathering gloom around, like new and sudden thoughts in some human brain. The little village whose outlying cottages were boldly climbing the mountain's side lay hid in the shadow, but upon its high-pointed church spire the round ball gleamed brilliantly, as though played about by lightning, and the open doors of the houses revealed the red light of the fire on the hearths where the humble evening meal was preparing. The delicious calm of evening brooded over everything, and up here the flowers exhaled their intoxicating fragrance, which in the intense quiet of the air hung caressingly around the vine leaves, yet faint from the warm sun. Sometimes a clumsy May beetle would fall clattering upon the floor of the gallery, or a pair of swallows whirr twittering past to their nest,—nothing else disturbed the solemn repose of nature. And now the chords of Beethoven's funeral march rang out from the music-room into the stillness with an indescribable effect, but after the first few bars, Felicitas raised her head and cast a startled glance back into the room. Could those sounds come from the piano within? The whispering dying tones fell upon the young girl's ear with the force of a mysterious warning from the spirit world. Ah, the hands gliding over the keys were weary, weary unto death; and those tones which they called forth were the flutterings of the long-caged spirit sighing to be free forever!



## CHAPTER XIV.

THE adventures by fire and flood were not without evil consequences. During the night the child was attacked by catarrh fever, and Felicitas awoke next morning with a severe headache. Nevertheless she attended to all her customary duties with her usual diligence,—her wounded arm was not very painful, for the healing ointment had worked well during the night.

In the afternoon the Professor came home. He had just performed successfully an operation upon the eyes of one of his patients, which no physician had ventured hitherto to undertake. In his gait and carriage the usual quiet assured self-reliance was observable,—the colour in his cheeks was not a shade deeper than usual, but those who knew him intimately, might well wonder at the unwonted fire that burned in his eyes underneath the strong bushy eyebrows,—those usually cold steel gray eyes, which seemed made only to search closely into the very souls of others, could then, at certain moments, flash and glow with genial sympathy and heartfelt satisfaction.

He stood at the door of the court-yard, and asked Frederika, who was just coming into the house with a bucket of water, whether her illness of yesterday had passed away.

“Oh, I am quite well again, Herr Professor,” she said, putting down the bucket, “but the girl there,”—pointing across the court to the windows of a room upon the ground floor of the house,—“Caroline, I am sure, caught something yesterday in all that fire and water. I could scarcely sleep a wink last night,—she talked so loud in



her sleep,—and to-day she is going about with such a heavy head, and with a face the colour of scarlet, and——”

“You ought to have told me before, Frederika,” interrupted the Professor sternly.

“I did tell Madame; but she said it would soon pass over. Caroline has never had a doctor in her life since she came here, and she has grown up strong enough. Rank weeds grow apace, Herr Professor. There is no use in trying to be kind to her,”—she added, as she remarked a gathering cloud upon her hearer’s face,—“she has always ever since she was a little child, been an obstinate thing, behaving herself as though she were a king’s daughter,—she, a player girl! Often when I have baked or cooked up something particularly good for Madame, I have set aside some of it for her. I always think of others, sir! But do you suppose she ever touched it? Not a bit of it. I always had to give it to some one else. You see, Herr Professor, she has been this way from childhood. She has never eaten half enough since our old master died,—’tis a wonder to me that she has grown up so tall. And it is all because of her obstinacy and evil-minded arrogance,—she does not wish to accept anything from anybody. Did I not hear her with my own ears telling Heinrich, that when she had once left this horrible house she would work her fingers to the bone and send all that she earned to Madame, until every penny that she had cost, every mouthful of bread that she had eaten here, was well paid for?”

The old cook had not observed how, while she was pouring out her heart in this way, her auditor’s face had been more and more deeply dyed with crimson, until, scarcely waiting for the conclusion of the last sentence,



without replying a word he strode across the court-yard towards the window which she had pointed out to him. It was a high bow-window cut in the stone, opening nearly on the ground, and belonged to the room in which Frederika and Felicitas slept. It was open at present, and through it were plainly seen the bare whitewashed walls and clumsy scanty furniture; it was the same small dreary room in which the child of four years of age had sobbed through her first night of childish longing for her mother. There she was now at the window—the obstinate outcast—who would not even satisfy her hunger in this hated house—who would work her fingers to the bone that she might free herself from all obligation—there was pride which she had preserved with even masculine determination in the midst of daily humiliations, and a soul inspired by indomitable energy and inexhaustible power, all existing in that fair young creature now apparently sleeping the lovely careless sleep of a child. Her head was resting upon her arm, which was lying upon the window-sill; the snowy forehead and the glittering splendour of the hair contrasting strangely with the gray stone. The pure profile with the lips softly closed and the depression of the corners of the mouth wore an expression of innocence and gentle melancholy; the eyes which could flash out such bitter hate and defiance were closed, their long dark lashes resting upon her cheeks.

The Professor advanced noiselessly and regarded her for a moment in silence, standing immovably by the window,—then he bent over her.

“Felicitas!” his voice was gentle and full of kindly sympathy.

She started up and gazed incredulously into the eyes which were fixed upon her; her name spoken by his lips



acted upon her like an electric shock. She drew up her figure, which had just now leaned upon the sill in the relaxation almost of childhood, and in every line of her face there was expressed absolute determination as if to repel some expected hostile attack.

The Professor entirely ignored the transformation.

"I hear from Frederika that you are ill," he said with the friendly tone usual with a physician.

"I feel quite well again," she answered with constraint. "Undisturbed repose has always proved my best medicine."

"Hm,—nevertheless you look——" he did not finish the sentence, but put his hand across the window-sill, and attempted to take hold of her wrist. She retreated several steps into the room.

"Be reasonable, Felicitas!" he said with serious kindness, but his brows contracted gloomily as the girl, clasping her hands almost convulsively in front of her, did not approach him. In spite of the thick beard, the angry compression of his lips could plainly be seen.

"Then it is no longer your physician who addresses you, but your guardian," he said harshly, "and as such I command you to come here!"

She did not look up, her eyes were still fixed on the ground, and her chest heaved as though with an inward conflict, but she slowly approached the window, and with averted face extended her hand, which he gently took in his. The well-shaped little hand, hardened by labour, trembled so violently that an expression of great compassion crossed the Professor's face.

"Again, you wilful, foolish child," he said with gentle gravity, "you have compelled me to treat you with severity—and I had hoped that we might part without one more embittered word. Have you then no look



for me or for my mother but one of inextinguishable hatred?"

"We must all reap as we sow!" she replied in smothered accents as she tried to withdraw her hand from his, looking at the slender fingers, that enclosed her wrist gently and firmly, with as much horror as though they had been of red-hot iron.

But he dropped her hand quickly,—gentleness and sympathy disappeared from his face,—evidently provoked, he struck with the end of his cane at some innocent blades of grass that were growing in the chinks of the wall. Felicitas breathed again, this rough, harsh manner was familiar to her—it was his own—she hated his sympathy.

"Always the same accusation," he said at last coldly. "However your exaggerated pride might be wounded by it, it was our duty to bring you up with most moderate expectations. I can bear the burden of your hatred calmly, for I did my best, and desired only your best good—and my mother? well, her love may be difficult to gain, I will not deny that, but she is incorruptibly just, and her fear of God would never have allowed her to permit any real harm or injustice to have befallen you. You are about to go out into the world upon your own responsibility. In your case docility is specially needful. How can you expect to succeed in intercourse with others while you so rigidly retain your false views of life? How can those defiant eyes ever win affection or good will?"

She raised her eyes, and looked him calmly and firmly in the face.

"If any one can prove to me that my ideas of right will not bear the pure light of reason I will willingly renounce them," she replied in her low, expressive voice, "but I know that I am not alone in my conviction that no



One, whoever he may be, has the right to condemn another to intellectual death; I know that thousands feel, as I do, how unjust and wrong it is to deny to any human soul the gratification for which it thirsts, simply because it is confined in a low-born body. I go out into the world with confidence, for I believe in human nature, and rely upon finding those towards whom I shall certainly not preserve an attitude of defiance. A girl in my unfortunate circumstances, who is obliged to live among heartless people, has no other weapon than her pride, no support except the consciousness that she is God's child, and may be a partaker of his spirit. He is no respecter of persons, for Him the distinctions of rank and class do not exist—they are human inventions, and the more narrow and contracted the soul, the more does it cling to such distinctions."

She turned slowly away, and disappeared behind the door leading into the servants' room, while he stood without gazing after her. He pulled his hat down over his forehead, and walked towards the house. No one could tell what was going on in that bowed head, but one thing was certain, the glow which had shone in his eyes when he first returned to the house that afternoon had vanished—gloomy thoughts were evidently brooding behind that deeply-furrowed brow.

In the hall were the young lawyer Franz, and Heinrich. The Professor started as if waking from a dream, as their voices struck upon his ear.

"So you have patients in the house, Professor," said the lawyer, shaking hands with him. "The fire has had evil consequences, as I hear. The child——"

"Has catarrh fever," completed the Professor dryly. He evidently was not in the humour for further explanations.



"Ah, Herr Professor, that is of very little consequence," said Heinrich. "The child is a poor, wretched little creature, pining away all the time—but when a girl like Fay, who never has an ache or a pain all the year round, hangs her head, it is enough to make any one anxious."

"I have really not been able to perceive much hanging of the head," said the Professor,—one could see the corners of his mouth twitching ironically beneath his beard. "She holds her head as erect as is at all necessary, rely upon it, Heinrich!"

He went up-stairs with Franz. At the top of the first flight Anna ran towards them—she was barefoot, and in her night-dress, her poor little cheeks were scarlet with fever, and her eyes were swollen with crying.

"Mamma is gone, and Rosa is gone—and Anna wants a drink of water!" she cried out to the Professor. Much displeased, he took her in his arms and carried her back into the bed-room. No one was to be seen. Greatly irritated, he called the maid. A distant door was heard to open, and Rosa, flat-iron in hand, her cheeks aflame, came running along the passage. In the distant room a huge pile of snowy muslin could be seen upon the ironing-table.

"Where are you? How can you leave this sick child entirely alone?" he cried out to her, as she entered the room.

"Ah, Herr Professor, I cannot be in two places at once," said the girl, almost crying with vexation. "My gracious lady must always have a fresh white muslin dress every morning—there is no end to the washing and ironing; these muslin dresses make more work than——"

She stopped short, for the young lawyer was seized with a violent fit of laughter.

"Alas for the lady in simple white muslin!" cried he,



actually holding his sides, for the gloomy embarrassed countenance of his friend struck him as infinitely comical.

"My mistress thought," Rosa went on with her defence, "that as Anna had only a bad cold, she might easily be left alone for half an hour—her toys were all on her bed where she could get them."

"And where is my cousin?" asked the Professor, harshly.

"My mistress and Madame Hellwig have gone together to the meeting of the Missionary Society."

"Indeed!" He waived all further explanation, and looked positively angry. "Now go back and get through with that stuff," he ordered, pointing towards the door whence she had come; then he called Frederika, but the old cook, having just put her hands into her fresh dough, sent Felicitas.

The young girl came up-stairs. The flush caused by her late excitement had not yet quite left her cheek,—but her look coolly scanned the irritated countenance of the Professor. She stood still, with quiet dignity, awaiting his orders. It evidently cost him a struggle to address her.

"There is no one to take care of little Anna. Will you stay with her until her mother's return?" he asked, and an attentive listener might have observed the effort with which he compelled his voice to take a gentle tone.

"Most willingly," she answered, without embarrassment. "There is only one objection to my doing so. The child's mother does not like to have her little daughter with me. But if you will take all responsibility—I will do what you ask."

"Certainly I will."

Without another word, she entered the bed-room and



closed the door. The young lawyer looked after her with sparkling eyes.

"It is Heinrich's strange fashion to call her 'Fay,'" he said to the Professor, as they went up the second flight of stairs to the room of the latter,—“and oddly as the name sounds from his rude lips, it suits her marvellously. I must frankly confess that I cannot conceive how you yourself, and your mother, have had the courage to place this remarkable girl upon a footing with your old cook and that pert lady's maid.”

"Ah, you think we should have robed her in silks and velvets?" cried the Professor, more agitated than his friend had ever known him. "And as a daughter has been denied to the House of Hellwig, the empty place could not have been better filled than by this Fay, or rather Sphinx, as I call her. You were always an enthusiast! There is no possible objection," his voice vibrated with excitement, "to your making the juggler's daughter Madame Franz—as her guardian I will bestow my blessing upon you!"

The handsome face of the young lawyer flushed to the roots of his hair. For one moment he turned in confusion, and looked from the window across the Square—they had entered the Professor's room,—and then turning again with a smile, and not without a shade of irony in his voice, he replied:

"If I comprehend in the least the workings of that girl's mind, she will scarcely trouble herself concerning her guardian's blessing, or even consent—her own decision is all I should have to consult—and if you think to scare me by the term 'juggler's daughter,' you are greatly mistaken in me, my revered Professor. For you, indeed, with your ideas, such a thought would unhinge your whole nervous system. What! commingle the warm



impulsive blood, coming quick from the heart of the juggler's daughter, and the cool sluggish stream which flows in your veins from your long line of eminently respectable merchant ancestors—why, the idea is monstrous—those worthies there would turn in their graves!”

He pointed into the next room through the open door. There, upon the wall, was hanging a long row of well-painted portraits in oil, all stately respectable men, with sparkling diamonds on their fingers, and in their faultlessly tied cravats. They were the various Burgomasters and Councillors of Commerce, who had once borne the name of Hellwig.

The Professor crossed the room and entered the apartment—the stings of his friend's irony seemed to glide harmlessly off from him. He folded his arms upon his chest and walked several times up and down before the portraits. “They have lived blameless lives,” he said suddenly, standing still. “Has this exterior of stainless dignity and worth been attained and preserved without fierce mental conflicts? I cannot believe it. Human nature is antagonistic, it rebels most obstinately just where it should obey most implicitly. Yet all their sacrifices have been as blocks of stone contributed to form one solid structure, and this structure is called ‘The House of Hellwig.’ Have they been formed and brought together only to be thrown down like a house of cards by some unworthy descendant? God forbid!”

It really seemed as if he suppressed some inward struggle with these words, for the unwonted excitement which Franz had observed with such surprise entirely disappeared when he returned to his own room.

Felicitas had been sitting about half an hour by the child's bedside, when the Councillor's widow came home. Her face darkened at once at sight of the young girl.



"How did you come here, Caroline?" she asked sharply throwing her sunshade upon the sofa, and drawing off her Swedish gloves. "I certainly did not require this service of you."

"But *I* did!" said the Professor, as he suddenly appeared behind her upon the threshold of the open door. "Your child needed attendance, she ran out to me bare footed as I came up-stairs."

"Impossible! Oh, Anna, how could you be so disobedient?"

"Are you really in doubt, Adele, as to who was to blame in this case?" asked the Professor, still controlling himself—although the tone of his voice betrayed his displeasure.

"Oh Heavens! How I am tormented with that careless creature Rosa! She has nothing in the world to do except to take care of this child, and yet I know that the moment my back is turned she is either gaping out of the window, or standing before the looking-glass."

"She happens at this moment to be standing before the ironing-table labouring in the sweat of her brow at a dress which you must *a tout prix* put on to-morrow," interrupted her cousin, emphasizing every word with cutting contempt.

She started guiltily. For one moment she was quite overwhelmed with confusion, but she quickly recovered herself.

"Heavens, how stupid!" she cried again, "she has entirely misunderstood me—how unfortunate I am!"

"Well," he again interrupted her, "we will suppose it a misunderstanding and let it go. But how could you leave your sick child in the charge of a maid who is, as you have just declared, so grossly careless?"

"John I obeyed the call of a sacred duty," answered



the young widow, casting up her beautiful eyes with an expression of pious enthusiasm.

"Your most sacred duty is your duty to your child!" he cried, now really angry—"I, as your physician, sent you here, not to occupy yourself with missionary societies, but solely and simply for the sake of your child!"

"Oh, John, what would aunt and papa say if they should hear you? you used to think so differently."

"That I grant you, but reflection always leads us to the firm conviction that we should exert our best and strongest powers in the sphere where Providence has placed us. A hundred children brought from Paganism into the bosom of the church through your means could not relieve you from one iota of the blame that must attach to you for any neglect of your own child!"

The young widow's face glowed like a peony, but she struggled bravely for her usual gentleness—and succeeded.

"Do not be so harsh to me, John," she entreated. "Remember I am only a weak woman who always means to do what is right. If I have erred, it was out of affection for your mother who wished me to accompany her,—I promise you it shall not occur again."

The young widow spoke in the most melodious tone of her flute-like voice, and offered her hand to her cousin with a bewitching smile. Strange—the grave man blushed like a girl. Unconsciously he cast a shy glance towards the figure by the bedside bending over the little girl—then took the proffered hand in two fingers, and coldly dropped it. The dove-like eyes, which so beseechingly sought his, suddenly flashed, and the face grew pale—but tranquillity was bravely maintained. The young mother took her child's head between her hands and kissed the feverish little forehead.

"I will take care of Anna now, and I thank you most



cordially, dear Caroline, for taking my place here in my absence," she said kindly to Felicitas.

The young girl rose to go—but the child began to cry bitterly, and throwing her arms around her, held her tightly with both hands.

The Professor felt the poor little wrist.

"She has a high fever, I cannot consent to have her excited further," he said kindly but coldly to Felicitas. "Will you have the kindness to sit beside her until she falls asleep?"

She silently resumed her seat, and he left the room. At the same time the Councillor's widow retired hastily into her sitting-room, and closed the door behind her with something of a slam. Felicitas heard her walking up and down with agitated steps, and then there came a sharp sound like the tearing of muslin. Little Anna started up and listened, and when the sound was repeated in quick succession, she began to tremble violently and burst into tears.

"Mamma, mamma!" she cried suddenly, "I will be good! I will not do so again. Don't, dear mamma!"

At this moment Rosa entered. Her usually rosy face looked quite pale.

"She is tearing something to pieces again. I heard it distinctly on the landing," she whispered to Felicitas with an expression of great disgust. "Lie still, my darling," she said, soothingly to the child. "Mamma will not hurt you,—she will not come here now, and by-and-by she will be kind again."

Within, a door opened and shut, the Councillor's widow had evidently gone out of the room. Rosa now entered it, and returned immediately with a small bundle of white rags in her hand. They were the remains of a lace pocket handkerchief.



"She is perfectly beside herself when she falls into one of her rages," grumbled the maid. "She tears to pieces whatever she has in her hands, and strikes right and left without mercy. That poor little thing knows that well enough."

Felicitas pressed the child to her heart, as if to shield her from her mother's violent outbreak of passion,—but there was no ground for her anxiety. The voice of the young widow was suddenly heard from the landing without in all its bell-like clearness of tone,—she was chatting cheerfully with young Franz as he went down stairs, and, when shortly afterwards she entered the bed-room, she looked more lovely and gentle than ever. The recent angry flush had subsided, leaving only a delicate carmine tint on either softly-rounded cheek, and no one would have dreamed that the heightened brilliancy of the eyes which beamed in that beautiful face was the result of anything but some lofty ebullition of feminine enthusiasm.

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## CHAPTER XV.

WHEN, at the Professor's request, Felicitas took her station by little Anna's bedside, she never dreamed that she had undertaken an office which she was to retain for many days. The child became dangerously ill, and would not suffer either her mother or Rosa to approach her. Upon the Professor and Felicitas, therefore, the charge of watching by her and giving her her medicine devolved. In her delirium the torn handkerchief played a conspicuous part. John listened with amusement to her childish



cries of anguish and fear, and more than once called up a blush of confusion and terror into his cousin's cheeks by his persistent searching questions. She, however, stoutly affirmed—and Rosa always confirmed her assertion—that the child alluded to some frightful dream which she had had.

Felicitas soon became most skilful in her duties as nurse; for although daily and hourly intercourse with the Professor at first made her position a very trying one, yet the anxiety which they shared together for the child's life, helped her to overcome the difficulties of her situation more quickly than she had thought possible. She was amazed to find how well she understood him in his office of physician. While others—even the child's mother—thought him impenetrable, she always knew whether he considered the danger on the increase, or whether he had begun to hope,—and this almost entirely without a word of explanation on his part calling her to note any change that was taking place. He relieved her by watching himself on alternate nights, and during the day he spent much time in the sick-room. He would sit patiently for hours by the bedside, laying one and then the other of his cool hands upon the child's hot forehead. The little girl would often fall asleep, thus soothed by his gentle hand, which really seemed to possess magnetic power.

With determined aversion Felicitas tried to drive from her mind the involuntary comparisons that would suggest themselves, as sitting at some distance from him her glance rested upon his face and figure. There were the same hard, irregular lines in the face, the same broad, massive forehead, above which the thick hair was most carefully and smoothly brushed, the same eyes, the same voice, everything just as she remembered him the terror of her childhood,—but she looked in vain for that gloomy



air of asceticism which had made the youthful face and figure so prematurely old and forbidding. A mild light seemed to surround that broad forehead,—and as she listened to the tones of his voice as he tenderly soothed the suffering child, she could not but confess to herself that he certainly appreciated fully the sacredness of his calling. He did not stand contemplating, with a cold shrug of his shoulders, the unavoidable suffering of others; he not only tried to rescue the body from pain and death,—but the agonized soul might find support and sympathy in his eyes, and gather courage and consolation from his voice. He had a command of language which few men possess. Words and tones were at his bidding which stirred electrically the heart of the listener. Who could at such times remember his stiff, awkward movements, or his repellant demeanour in social intercourse? His presence compelled admiration,—he was a man conscious of power,—the deep-thinking, determined mediator between the two deadly opponents Life and Death. But whatever thoughts of this nature might at times haunt and fill Felicitas' mind, her concluding consideration was always the same. If he can think and feel humanely,—sympathizing with the needs and woes of the poorest of his fellow-men,—the despised child of the juggler has all the more reason to detest him, for to her he had been only an un pitying oppressor and prejudiced unjust judge.

During their present daily intercourse, he had never once adopted towards her that gentle tone and manner which she so dreaded, and against which she defended herself with the weapons of defiance and pride. He preserved uninterruptedly the air of common kindness which he had used towards her since their last conversation,—and this was expressed far more in manner than in words, as, except to ask her some unavoidable question, he hardly



ever addressed her. He had a hard part to play with the Councillor's widow. At first she behaved like one beside herself, and insisted that Felicitas should resign her post to herself or to Rosa—all John's quiet decision of manner was necessary to bring her to reason. Then she could not be prevented from putting in at the door at all hours that curly head which the child so dreaded,—almost always when her cousin and Felicitas were together in the room. She wept and wrung her white hands. Whatever poets may say about heroines 'lovely in enchanting tears,' there is no human face that can be beautiful in a burst of tears that springs from the extreme of agony,—but no line was deepened in that lovely oval face, no disfiguring redness appeared upon the transparent skin,—the pearly drops rolled gently over the peachy cheeks. No artist could imagine a more exquisite artistically weeping Mater Dolorosa. What a contrast between her and the pale, anxious watcher by the child's bed! Every evening punctually, she appeared in an elegant wrapper, a cap of cobweb lace resting lightly upon her curls, and a devotional book in her hand, and begged to be allowed to watch. One and the same contest always ensued between her cousin and herself. She made the same protestations against what she called this invasion of her maternal rights, and departed to her bed gently weeping and lamenting, to arise the next morning fresh as a spring rose.

It was the ninth evening of little Anna's illness. The child lay in a dull stupor. Now and then an unmeaning murmur would escape her lips. The Professor had been for a long while sitting motionless by her bedside, with his head bowed upon his clasped hands; suddenly he arose and beckened Felicitas into the next room.

"You watched last night and have not allowed your-



self one moment of rest now for two days," he said, "and yet I am going to ask a further sacrifice of you. There will be a crisis to-night. I could easily share my watch with my cousin or Rosa, for the child is entirely unconscious, but I need beside me thorough thoughtfulness and self-forgetfulness. Will you watch again to-night?"

"Yes."

"But you will have to pass hours of anxiety and suspense,—do you think you are strong enough?"

"Oh yes. I love the child—and in short, I *will* be strong enough."

"Have you such firm faith in the power of your will?" His voice began to express the gentleness which she so dreaded.

"It has never yet failed me," she replied, and her calm eyes grew stern and repellant.

The night fell—a lovely, still spring night. The bright glittering moonlight was bathing the sleeping town,—it shone into the long room in the merchant's house where the old portraits were hanging, touching them with silver, and breathing a strange life into their motionless features. The flowers on the carpet bloomed afresh in the magic light, and a million silvery gleams were reflected from the antique chandelier hanging from the centre of the ceiling. But within, in the sick-room, mighty forces were battling above the narrow bed for the mastery. The conflict was fierce indeed. The child lay there in violent convulsions. The Professor stood beside her with his eyes riveted upon the writhing limbs and the distorted face. He had done everything that human science and medical skill could suggest,—and now he was patiently abiding the issue of his unwearied efforts to assist the beneficent forces of nature.

The clock upon the church tower struck twelve in



slow, deliberate strokes. Felicitas, who was leaning over the foot of the bed, shuddered,—it seemed to her that that long ringing clang must bear away the childish soul upon its mighty waves of sound, and, in fact, the tightly-strung limbs suddenly relaxed, the clenched hands opened and fell feebly upon the covering of the bed, and after a few more minutes the head lay quietly upon the pillow. The Professor leaned over her silently for awhile, and then raising his head, he whispered with emotion,—“I think she will recover!”

Felicitas gazed anxiously at her little charge,—she listened to her gentle breathing, and saw how the wearied limbs had fallen into a childish attitude of repose. Then she rose noiselessly and went into the next room. She stepped to the open window. The delicious night-air in which a breath of morning already mingled encircled her refreshingly,—she leaned her weary head against the stone embrasure of the window, and her clasped hands hung idly before her. On the window-sill was a tall tea-rose bush,—one exquisite flower, doubly pale in the white moonlight, hung above her snowy brow and glimmering hair. Her pulses throbbed feverishly—no wonder; within there, in that narrow room, death had hovered very near a human life. The tension of her nerves during the last few hours had been fearful,—her ears had heard only the sudden shrill shrieks of the child,—she had seen nothing but the convulsed little form and the mute, pale face of the physician who had asked the assistance, which she could render, only by a glance or a sign. They had been alone together within four walls, one in the exercise of mercy and compassion—divided by a deep gulf of hatred and prejudice.

The dry heated eyes of the young girl gazed from the window at the front of the town-hall, shining bright in



the moonlight. The statues on either side of the clock—the Virgin and St. Boniface—stood out in ghostly life from their niches,—what good did they do standing protectingly and beneficently watching there? Directly beneath them the tragedy had taken place. Those three high windows, now glittering silver, had shone on that sad evening long ago—with the golden light of the fairy-like illumination within,—and upon that very spot upon the floor where now the moon's pale ray was sleeping, the wondrously lovely woman had stood unfalteringly before the crowd of spectators and the deadly weapons,—but beneath her breastplate a mother's heart was throbbing tenderly and anxiously,—for a little child was sleeping lonely at the inn for whom she would work until—the six shots fell and all was over.

The Professor now came out of the sick-room and closed the door noiselessly behind him. He went up to Felicitas, who was still standing immovably at the window.

“She is sleeping gently,” he said. “I will spend the remainder of the night with her,—now go and rest”

Scarcely waiting for him to finish his sentence, Felicitas left the window and walked silently past him to leave the room.

“I think we can hardly separate so coldly to-night,” he said in a low voice before she could reach the door—it seemed as if against his will he broke the spell of silence. “During these last days we have stood faithfully by one another like true comrades, battling with death for a human life,—remember that,” he added with warmth. “In a few weeks we shall certainly part at all events, perhaps never to see each other again in this world. I must do you and myself the justice to tell you that by your own force of character you have utterly



destroyed the prejudice and dislike of the last nine years. Only in one dark spot—in your inextinguishable hatred and obstinacy—do I recognize the wayward child who once aroused all my sternness and severity.”

Felicitas had advanced several steps towards him. The moonlight illuminated her whole figure. As she stood there erect with compressed lip and pale face turned towards him over her shoulder, there was indeed an air of determined hostility in her whole attitude and expression.

“In all physical ailments you always inquire into causes before you form an opinion,” she replied. “But you never thought it worth your trouble to inquire whence proceeded that disease, as you chose to call it, of the soul, which you desired to root out. You judged blindly upon vague hints of information, and are just as blamable as though one of your patients had died through your medical neglect. Suddenly deprive a grown man of his ideal, the golden future of which he always has dreamed longingly, and, be he never so pious and virtuous, he cannot, in the first shock of his loss, fold his hands quietly and submit,—how much less then could a child only nine years old, a child, whose whole soul had been filled with anticipations of the day when she should once more see her idolized mother—in whose mind there was no hope, no dream—in whose heart no throb that was not in some way connected with this blissful meeting!”

She stopped for a moment,—but no word passed her hearer’s lips,—he did not even look at her. At the beginning of her accusation he had once made a sudden hasty movement as if to interrupt her,—but as she proceeded he stood immovable, in a listening attitude, not



even raising his hand to stroke his beard—a motion common with him when his attention was excited.

“My uncle preserved to me my happy ignorance,” she continued, after a short pause,—“but he died, and with him all pity died in this house. That morning I had gone for the first time to my mother’s grave,—only the evening before I had learned her terrible fate,—they told me at the same time that the juggler’s wife was a lost creature, whom even a merciful God would not admit into his heaven——”

“Why did you not tell me all this then?” interrupted the Professor gloomily.

Felicitas, out of consideration for the sick child, had spoken in an undertone, which added intensity to her expression of bitterness. She continued in the same tone—turning her beautiful face flushed with scorn fully towards him:

“Why did I not tell you all this then?” she repeated. “Because you had already declared that the class from which I sprung was utterly odious to you, and that there was hopeless levity in my blood.” The Professor covered his eyes with his hand for a moment. “Young as I was, with my first bitter experience of life fresh upon me, I knew well at that moment that I should find no sympathy, no pity. And have you ever had any sympathy or pity for the player’s child?” she asked, advancing one step towards him, and emphasizing every word with indescribable bitterness. “Has it ever occurred to you that the creature whom you wished to bow beneath the yoke of servitude might perhaps have capacity to think? Have you not stretched her soul upon the rack repeatedly with your determination to root out, like noxious weeds, every desire that she might entertain for mental culture—every expression of becoming self-reliance—



every aspiration to a loftier atmosphere? Do not think that I accuse you of wrong in bringing me up to labour. Labour even the hardest and most fatiguing can never be a disgrace. I work gladly,—but that you did your best to make me a soulless toiling machine—that you tried to crush out in me that intellectual element which alone can illuminate and ennoble a life of hard labour—that I can never forget nor forgive!”

“Never, Felicitas?”

The young girl shook her head with a wild gesture of refusal.

“Then I must resign myself to your resolution,” he said, with a slight smile that was involuntarily, or even in spite of himself, full of melancholy. “I have offended you mortally, and yet—I repeat it—I could not do otherwise.” He walked several times up and down the room. “In order to justify myself, I must once more allude to what I know gives you great pain,” he continued quickly. “You are entirely without means, and are of—despised origin. You are necessitated to earn your own living. It would have been cruel to have bestowed upon you an education fitting you for a higher position in life, and then to have degraded you to the level of a servant,—and yet I could not have given you any other position,—for do you suppose that any family could have been induced to receive among their children as a governess the daughter of a juggler? Do you not know that a man,”—he stopped for a moment, his breath came quickly, and his face grew white,—“yes, that a man of good position who might desire to link his life with yours would be forced to sacrifice much—both in himself and his relations with the world? And what an unimaginable humiliation would that be for your proud heart! This is the result of the social laws which you despise—but in obedi-



ence to which numbers of men exercise an amount of self-control and self-denial that you do not dream of—clinging to the maintenance of them from reverence for the past and from a conviction that they are a political necessity. And I too must obey them,—we do not all carry our sufferings written upon our foreheads—and my submission to them condemns me to a life of self-denial and—loneliness.”

He was silent. It thrilled Felicitas strangely, this involuntary, nay, almost unwilling revelation of his heart-secrets which this strong reserved man was hastily making with trembling lips at this midnight hour. And so he had doubtless given his heart to some woman who stood socially far, far above him. In the midst of the hate and anger which filled her soul towards him, she was conscious of being touched by a sorrow such as she had never known before. Was it possible that she could feel sympathy for him? Had she indeed then no force of character—was she so weak?—she who such a short time before had declared so emphatically that she should ‘feel no pity for any misfortune that might happen to him?’ And was he in fact to be pitied—why, instead of folding his hands idly in his lap, did he not strive in a manly way for the lofty prize?

“Well, Felicitas, have you nothing to say?” he asked; “or are you again offended by my explanation, which is an honest one?”

“No,” she replied coldly. “These are your individual views,—I have not the smallest desire to alter them. But you cannot deprive me of the conviction that there exist kind-hearted, unprejudiced people in the world, who will recognize an honest heart and good intentions even in a juggler’s daughter. But why should I reply? We should never come to the end. You see everything from



your stand-point of excessive respectability where you encase yourself in armour, that even your thoughts may not deviate from a certain routine. I belong to the class, despised by you and such as you, of those who believe that thought is and should be free. As you yourself say, our paths in life will diverge in a few weeks never to meet again; in mind we are already far apart. Have you any other commands for me with regard to the sick child?"

He shook his head, and before he could say a word she had left the room.

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## CHAPTER XVI.

ANNA'S recovery advanced rapidly, but Felicitas was not yet relieved from her duties as nurse. The little girl, usually quiet and docile, grew fretful and excited as soon as she left her bedside, and there was nothing for the mother to do but to entreat Felicitas to take charge of her daughter until she was perfectly recovered. The young widow did this all the more willingly, as the Professor no longer spent any length of time in the sick-room. He came every morning to see the child, but his visits scarcely lasted three minutes. Sometimes he took her in his arms and carried her up and down for awhile in the sunny sheltered court-yard, but except at such times he was rarely seen in the house. He seemed suddenly to have been seized by a positive passion for the garden; his whole mode of life was changed; he never studied in his room any more; whoever wished to speak to him was sent out to the garden. Frau Hellwig yielded with a wonderfully good grace to this freak, as she called the



alteration in his habits, and to the great delight of the Councillo.'s widow arranged matters so that their principal meals were taken in the garden. Thus the old house grew more quiet than ever, the family often did not return to it until after ten o'clock in the evening. But sometimes the Professor would come back earlier and alone; Felicitas would hear him slowly ascending the first flight of stairs, and then almost always an odd circumstance occurred. He would turn on the landing, and, as if mechanically, approach the sick-room, but just outside, when his hand must have almost touched the latch of the door, he would suddenly pause, as if recollecting himself, and then retracing his steps would mount the stairs to his room with redoubled speed. His room was just over the one where the child lay, and on these evenings he did not sit down quietly to his books, but walked restlessly up and down for hours,—this lonely pacing of his room always interested and excited Felicitas—she connected it in some way with his midnight confession.

About eight in the evening little Anna usually fell asleep, and then Rosa took Felicitas' place at the child's bedside, while she took her time of relaxation, and went up to the rooms under the roof. Aunt Cordula seemed to have overcome her late physical weakness, and to have no more presentiments of death,—she was more cheerful than ever, and would exult like a child in the anticipation of soon having Felicitas all to herself. She always waited supper for her. There stood the carefully ordered tea-table in the gallery,—some favourite delicacy of Felicitas' was always provided, and a whole bundle of freshly-arrived magazines and newspapers awaited her, to be read aloud. During these cosy delightful hours of refreshment, everything which had lately so excited and disturbed her mind would, often to her own surprise, utterly



fade away. She never spoke of what went on in the front mansion, and the old Mam'selle—true to her custom of years—never asked a question; and thus the strange experiences through which she was passing naturally and easily fell into the background.

One beautiful sunny afternoon Felicitas was sitting alone with little Anna,—a church-like stillness pervaded the house; the Councillor's widow and Madame had gone to make a round of visits, and the Professor was surely in the garden, for there was no sound of life from his room above. The child had been playing for a long while, but now she threw aside her toys, laid her head back on the pillow, and begged,—“Sing me a song, Caroline dear.”

She was extravagantly fond of hearing Felicitas sing. The young girl's voice was contralto,—its tones were full and round, issuing from the chest, without any uncertainty, like musical strokes upon a bell, and with that clear vibration which seems peculiar to the violoncello, and which in the human voice, without one shade of shrillness, breathes a tender melancholy, and is always expressive of intellectual refinement. The old Mam'selle, with her rare musical attainments and the finished culture which her own talent had attained under most excellent masters, had trained and educated this magnificent instrument well. Felicitas sang German songs in a perfectly classic artistic manner. She had discovered that she could always soothe the child by beginning some flowing melody very softly, only lending its full power to her voice after singing for some moments, and never then, if she dreamed that unkind ears were near.

‘O fresh young grass, O tender green!’

The exquisite song of Schumann's now resounded through the room, sung as only the lips of a true pure young girl



can sing it. Felicitas sung the first verse with touching simplicity and suppressed force, but at the beginning of the second: 'Apart from all, alone I go,—No human word can soothe my woe,'—her powerful voice swelled forth like the note of an organ. Suddenly, above, in the Professor's room, she heard a chair, not pushed aside, but hurled away; hasty steps crossed to the door, and a bell rung violently and shrill, like an alarum, through the quiet house. It was the first time that the bell-rope in the second story had ever been put in requisition. Frederika hurried breathless up the two flights of stairs, and Felicitas stopped in deadly terror. After a few minutes the old cook came hobbling down again, and entered the sick-room.

"The Herr Professor sends you word not to sing any more,—he cannot study," she said in her rude, rough way. "He was as white as a sheet, and could hardly speak for anger. What do you behave so for? I never heard of such a thing in all my life! You sing exactly like a man, and, gracious Heavens! what a song! Just like a chimney sweep's! I never saw such a girl as you are! I used to sing very well when I was young, but I sung beautiful songs, oh, beautiful—'Life let us cherish,' and 'Lovely moon, thy quiet beaming.' You'd better let singing alone, Caroline. You don't know how to sing. Yes, and the Professor says you must take the child down into the court-yard and drag her about in her carriage a little."

Felicitas hid her glowing face in her hands—she seemed to have suffered a humiliating rebuke. How ashamed, how disgraced she felt! For although she could be bold and brave enough in defending her convictions, in telling the unadorned truth to her enemies, she was inconceivably shy and reserved with respect to her own talents



and acquirements. The idea that her voice might reach the ears of strangers would alone suffice to paralyze her powers and make her dumb; the thought of wearying or annoying any one with her singing, was too much. And now this had actually happened—she was thought forward—she had laid herself open to the charge of desiring to bring herself into notice, and therefore she had been punished and disgraced in this way. Madame's harshest injustice and most wilful misunderstanding and ill treatment had never drawn a tear from her eyes, but now she wept bitterly.

A quarter of an hour afterwards Felicitas was dragging the child's carriage up and down the court-yard. The feverish glow upon her cheeks was gradually disappearing beneath the refreshing breath of Spring, but it was powerless to remove the expression of gloomy reflection upon her brow. After a little while Madame returned, accompanied by the Councillor's widow, and at the same time the Professor appeared on the stairs, hat on head and cane in hand, about to take a walk. All three came into the court-yard. The Councillor's widow carried a tolerably large bundle, and after petting and kissing her child, she tore off a corner of the paper cover of her package, and said to her cousin with an arch smile:

“Just look here, John, am I not an extravagant creature? Although my heart is steeled against all the attractions of dress, I cannot resist a linen shop. I saw this beautiful table-cloth exposed for sale; now could I walk coldly by? Impossible! Before I knew what I was doing I had it rolled up under my arm, and this piece of exquisitely fine linen besides. But good-by to a handsome dress this winter! I must conscientiously fill up the gap that this will make in my finances by denying myself at least one winter dress,—but let it go, a notable Ger-



man housekeeper can hardly have her linen-press full enough."

The Professor did not reply—he was looking beyond her towards the gate of the court-yard. The poor woman whom Felicitas remembered to have seen lately in his study up-stairs, was just entering. She had a large bundle under her shawl, and made an almost reverential curtsy as she approached the Professor.

"Her Professor, my William can see again—he sees as well as I or anybody else," she said,—her voice trembled, and the tears gushed from her eyes. "Who would have thought it! Ah, he was so miserable, and we were all so unhappy! Now he can earn his living again, and I can die content, for I shall not leave a poor, helpless, blind boy behind me. Ah, Herr Professor, all the treasures that the world contains would not be too much for you! But we are such poor people we cannot dream of rewarding you for what you have done for us. I hope you won't be offended, Herr Professor, but I thought perhaps this little trifle——"

"Well, what do you mean?" interrupted the Professor hastily, retreating a few steps.

As she said the last words the woman opened her shawl, and disclosed a large bird-cage and a roll of linen.

"You seemed to like so much to listen to this nightingale when you used to come to us," she began again, "and if you only put the little thing in a smaller cage you can easily carry it back with you to Bonn. And the piece of linen, it is not very fine, but I spun it myself, and perhaps Madame Hellwig would use it for towels——"

"What do you mean, woman, by depriving your husband of that bird which he is so fond of?" said the Professor. "I cannot endure birds, positively cannot bear them,—and why should you feel yourself called upon to



provide us with house linen? Put these things up again and go directly home."

The woman stood before him surprised and speechless.

"You ought to have spared me this, Frau Walter!" he said more gently. "I have told you repeatedly that you must not bring me anything. There, now go, and tell William that I shall certainly come to look after him once more to-morrow."

He gave her his hand, and pulled the shawl over the objects of her unfortunate expedition. The woman curtsied with downcast eyes and went away. Madame and the Councillor's widow had been mute witnesses of the scene,—the countenance of the former had expressed great disapprobation, at one time it had seemed almost as if she would have taken part in what was going on.

"Now, really, I cannot understand you, John," she said, in a tone of reproach, as soon as the woman had left. "When I think of all that your education has cost, it seems to me that you have no right whatever to refuse any compensation for your services. Her idea about the bird was stupid enough to be sure—its shrill piping would ill accord with my quiet house, but if I had had my way the woman should have left the linen here—a good piece of linen is not to be thrown away in that style, let me tell you."

"Perhaps then, dear aunt, my charitable thoughts would hardly have found favour in your sight," said the Councillor's widow, in a jesting tone. "Only think, John," she continued, growing serious, "we have just heard this morning of an unfortunate family, so poor that the poor little children have scarcely rags to cover them, and they are most excellent people, too. Aunt and I are thinking about making a collection for them. If you, now, had only taken the linen, I should have come begging to you,



and I should have made you give it all to me,—it would have made such nice clothes for those poor children—I would have sewed upon them myself.”

“Oh, the depth of this Christian charity!” interrupted the Professor, with a laugh of angry contempt. “The only possession of one poor family must be taken to supply the necessities of another, and the magnanimous deviser and executor of this work of love stands beaming upon a wicked world with a halo of feminine compassion surrounding her fair curls.”

“You are unkind, John,” cried the young widow, offended,—“I like to give——”

“Undoubtedly, when it costs you nothing in the world, Adele,” he continued, ironically. “Why does not the notable German housekeeper open the drawers of her overflowing linen-press? Why not take this superfluous piece?” he touched the roll of linen that she had in her arms. Both ladies warded off his hand as though they feared an attempt upon the young widow’s life.

“Oh, that is carrying the joke a great deal too far, John,” she said, in a complaining tone,—“this exquisitely fine linen!”

“You have often reproached me,” the Professor said, turning to his mother, without appearing to have heard his cousin’s last remarks, “by declaring that I do not sufficiently prize the results of my very expensive education; I assure you, I am a practical man. I admit the duty which lies at every one’s door, of getting and gaining,—but my profession leads me also to infinitely higher aims—it gives scope for the exercise of charity and benevolence, to a greater degree than in any other calling—with the exception, perhaps, of the church. I certainly shall never rank myself among those physicians who, with one hand, assist a poor man to be rid of a disease, while they



plunge the other into his pocket and deprive him of the means of maintaining the life they have saved."

Until now Felicitas' presence had been unobserved. His glance passed over her unconsciously—but was arrested and fettered for a moment by the glowing expression of involuntary satisfaction that beamed in the girl's face,—for the first time those four eyes encountered each other with a lightning glance of mutual understanding and sympathy—but only for one moment,—Felicitas, overcome with sudden self-consciousness, dropped her eyelids, and the Professor, by a hasty movement, pulled his hat so low over his eyebrows that his flushed face was almost concealed by its broad brim.

"Just as you please—I don't care—it is your own affair, John, you can think as you choose," said Madame coldly. "Your Grandfather Hellwig would hardly have been pleased to have listened to your views. The practice of medicine is your business, and in matters of business, he used to say, there must be no sentimental considerations brought into play."

She walked away and entered the house. The Councillor's widow, pressing her cherished bundle to her heart with a lovely pouting air, followed her, walking by the side of the Professor. On the threshold, the latter turned and looked once more into the court-yard. Felicitas was just taking little Anna out of the carriage, that she might comply with her entreaty to be carried up and down two or three times. It seemed at one moment, while the child was being lifted up and clung with its arms, a dead weight around the neck of her kind nurse, as if the slender figure must break beneath its burden. The Professor turned back into the court.

"I have several times forbidden your carrying the child," he said reprovingly, with some irritation,—“she



is too heavy for you. Did not Frederika tell you this afternoon that Heinrich must assist you?"

"No, she forgot it. Heinrich is not at home."

The Professor took the child from her arms and put it back into the carriage, talking to it gently but gravely. The expression of his face was gloomier and sterner than ever,—at any other time Felicitas would have coldly turned away from him, but to-day she was the cause of his ill humor,—she had interrupted the physician's profound, earnest studies with her singing, and had possibly broken up a new and most interesting train of ideas. But if he were ever so irritated and angry, she must relieve her mind of the burden that weighed upon it—he must know that she had erred ignorantly. The moment was decidedly favourable, as his face could not be seen—he was still bending over the child talking to her.

"I must beg your forgiveness for having annoyed you with my singing," she said timidly. This gentle entreating tone of voice, which was entirely new to him, produced an evident effect upon him—he stood up and looked searchingly into her face. "I pray you to believe," she continued, "that I had not the faintest suspicion that you were in the house at the time!"

The word singing awoke the remembrance of Felicitas' tears in little Anna's mind. "Oh, you naughty uncle, how poor Caroline cried!" said she, and shook her little clenched fist at him menacingly.

"Is what the child says true, Felicitas?" he asked quickly.

She avoided answering his question directly. "I have been much distressed by thinking——"

"That you might be suspected of a desire to be heard by others?" he interrupted her, and a fleeting smile hovered upon his lips. "Pray let me reassure you on



that point. However revengeful and implacable I may consider you, I could never accuse you of a desire to please—much as I might wish to do so; I sent to ask you to be quiet—not because you exactly disturbed me—but—because I cannot listen to your voice. That offends you, of course, extremely?”

Felicitas shook her head with a smile.

“Good—that is sensible! For the rest I will tell you something.” He bent his head low down and looked fixedly into her eyes. “Your song to-day betrayed a well-guarded secret to me!”

Felicitas was terribly frightened; he had then got some hint of her intercourse with Aunt Cordula. She felt herself blush crimson as she looked at him in anxious confusion.

“I know now why you have so peremptorily refused all future assistance from us. Into the sphere in which you will shortly live and move, it is true our arms could not reach. You are going upon the stage!”

“No; you are greatly mistaken,” she replied decidedly, and evidently relieved. “Although I hold the power of representing the creations of master-minds to be one of the noblest talents that human beings can possess, I have not the courage which such an undertaking demands. I am a perfect coward where any publicity is concerned, and should never achieve anything beyond mediocrity owing to my entire want of self-confidence. And, besides, in such a vocation it is necessary to possess thorough scientific musical knowledge such as I shall never acquire.”

“It is quite in your power to do so.”

“But I do not wish to attain to such knowledge. As a child, music always seemed to me something never to be learned, acquired like reading and writing,—but rather



an inspiration direct from Heaven, and I please myself by retaining this childish idea. That that, which melts me to tears and gives me such heart-felt delight, should depend upon stiff pedantic rules, and be mathematically produced upon paper in a series of ugly black marks,—this thought sensibly lessens my enjoyment. I do not like to think of it any more than to remember that every beautiful human face is formed upon a grinning skull,—no glimpse into machinery ever pleases me.”

“And here we come again upon the ground-tone of your nature, which revolts at all law and rule,” he said sarcastically, although he had listened with evident interest to her peculiar definition of music. “Then my conclusion was false, and your *very* striking anxiety superfluous,” he added sharply, after a pause. “It must be a most remarkable secret! I am half inclined to insist upon a revelation of your plans for the future, in right of my office as guardian.”

“It would be useless,” she replied. “I shall not speak. You yourself have pronounced me free at the end of two months to do what I choose.”

“Yes, yes,—that mistake has unfortunately been made,” he rejoined with irritation. “But it seems to me—not to speak harshly—at least very bold in any one as young as yourself to settle the question of your future entirely without counsel and aid of an older, more experienced person. Even suppose it were a question concerning the most important step in the life of a woman—the linking herself forever to——”

“In such a case my guardian is the last person to whom I should apply for advice,” Felicitas interrupted him, blushing scarlet. “I should have been already linked for life to a man of no character or principle, had I not been *bold* enough to decide in such matters entirely for



myself. You would willingly have said yes and amen to what were called Herr Wellner's honourable proposals, if I had been weak enough to allow myself to be frightened into compliance by the menaces and ill treatment to which I was subjected before your return home."

This reproof cut like a two-edged sword,—for it was just. The Professor bit his lips, and his look sought the stones at his feet.

"I thought indeed that it would be the best way in which to put an end to the task assigned me by my father," he said after a painful pause,—his voice had lost much of its wonted firmness. "It was an error, but it was not obstinately persisted in, as you know. If upon my mother's representation, and in accordance with her advice, I gave my consent, I certainly never attempted to combat your decision with severity or persuasion. My permission which you allude to will be the last exercise of my authority as guardian," he continued, not without bitterness. "I must leave you to your fate. You go to meet it joyously and hopefully?"

"Yes," answered the young girl with sparkling eyes.

"And you believe that you will be happy in your new relations?"

"As surely as I believe in another and happier life beyond the grave!"

As he asked the last question he riveted upon her the penetrating look, which certainly must often have proved effectual with the most obstinate of patients,—but as her eyes only gleamed more joyously, he turned away either offended or irritated, and said not another word. He gave his hand to little Anna, and went slowly into the house.

The same evening Rosa was sitting in the servants' room. Her lap was filled with some airy light blue ma-



terial, and her needle was flying with almost feverish speed. Frederika sat down to talk with her,—for the maid would have to sew until midnight, and the old cook had graciously proposed to make a cup of strong coffee, that they might keep themselves awake.

Ten had long struck. Felicitas was in her room preparing for rest, but the ceaseless gossip of the two women in the next room over their coffee made the small dreary bed-room unendurable. She opened the window wide, seated herself upon the sill, and with her hands clasped upon her knee, looked out into the court-yard. It was not quite dark there,—for the lamps in the rooms in the first and second stories were still burning, and through the high windows long rays of light fell upon the stone pavement, glistening upon the little bubbling fountain in the corner, bringing into sparkling relief various dim panes of glass in other corners, and even casting a pale reflection upon the distant façade of the back building. Above the building encircling the court-yard stretched the glittering heavens, as in times long gone by, the quiet stars looked down into this place, which superstition had made the scene of many a ghostly legend,—yes, those changeless stars had looked upon the blooming living forms whose shadowy shapes were now said to haunt the place with mournful wailings, in late repentance for the deeds done in the flesh,—noble knights and dignified merchants—aristocratic dames in velvet—and well-to-do wives of respectable citizens. Eyes, brilliant with the love of life had looked up to those stars, and eyes, blinded by dull egotism and conceit to the glory of God's universe, shy eyes, behind which lurked the consciousness of guilt,—and childish eyes, swimming in repentant tears,—*their* light was extinguished,—they were all mouldering in the earth, and still the great lesson which nature teaches of



change and decay, was unlearned. Generation after generation had opened their eyes and closed them again,—and between these two moments—what a struggle there had been for a handful of earth, titles and honours, full money-bags, and gorgeous attire! And the one element of human nature which moves the world, had been at work here busily—the love of rule—the unholy desire to crush down our fellow-men, and tread them under foot,—and where outward circumstances and inborn power had not yielded sufficient aid to this end, men had wrapped themselves in the incense-clouds of religion. Nothing has been so misunderstood and pressed into the service of worldly passions as the word of God, and no greater sins have desecrated his beautiful world than those perpetrated in his name.

Whilst such thoughts occupied the young girl's brain, Frederika's rough tones and the shrill soprano of the waiting-maid kept up a constant clatter in the next room.

“Yes,” said Rosa, with a sudden laugh, “my gracious mistress looked as if the skies were falling when the Professor came home to-night and told how he was making up a party of several ladies and gentlemen to visit the Thuringian forest the day after to-morrow,—*he* go with such a party! Oh, good Heavens! In B—— he sticks to his books year out and year in—visits his patients and goes to the University, and that's all,—never a ball, never a party. Oh, it's dreadful! I can't endure such strait-laced ideas in a man.”

“Fie! you ought to be ashamed of yourself, Rosa,” said Frederika, with irritation. “What would your mistress say if she heard you?”

“Well, well, there's reason in all things. When he was at her father's large school, he would scarcely eat and



drink for fear of not being holy and saintly enough,—then none of the scholars could bear him!”

“Oh, how wicked men are! And doesn't any one like him now?”

“Oh, now indeed,—now they all idolize him. Nobody knows how it all came about, but the students are crazy about him,—and as for the women—oh, it is really disgusting! I believe they would like to kiss his hands whenever he writes them a prescription. My mistress is just like all the rest,—sometimes she makes me too provoked. If he were only handsome, it would be a different thing. But such an ugly man as he is, with his red beard and bearish ways. I'd teach him better manners if I had anything to do with him. He cures everybody with rough words. For instance, my mistress went to bed with dreadful spasms,—he came up to the bedside, looked at her for a moment, as if he expected to see directly through her, and then said: ‘Collect yourself, Adele! Get up this moment. I will leave the room for a little while, and when I return I must find you sitting dressed in this chair,—do you understand me?’ And when he came back, sure enough there she was sitting, and the spasms never returned. But tell me yourself—do you consider that the right way to treat a lady?”

“Well, he might, to be sure, have been a little more polite,” replied the old cook.

“Oh, he tyrannizes over her dreadfully. The greatest delight she has in life is dress. I tell you, Frederika, in D—— we have wardrobes full of such beautiful dresses—they would delight your very eyes,—and whenever the fashion changes, everything is made new again. But just because that grum old Professor is always admiring simplicity, my mistress never puts on a handsome dress when he is by. Muslin, nothing but white muslin. I rather



think if he knew how expensive this wonderful simplicity is——He wanted my mistress to stay at home from this expedition on account of little Anna,—but some of the party came and invited her so pressingly that she is going. Don't you think, Frederika, that she will look lovely in this blue dress that she is going to wear?"

The gossip of the thoughtless Rosa produced a painful impression upon Felicitas. She slipped down from the window-sill, and determined to go into the servants' room,—her presence might prevent any further revelations concerning matters that certainly should not have been discussed by strangers. Her glance once more sought aimlessly the opposite wing of the house—she started. The astral lamp on the landing of the second story threw its rays upon the long corridor which led to Aunt Cordula's flight of stairs,—the two first windows here were quite brightly illuminated—the bare whitewashed walls could be distinctly seen. Along this wall a figure was slowly pacing, but it was certainly no shadowy ghostly presence—it was he whom the lady's-maid thought so ugly. Felicitas could distinctly see the powerful outline of his head—the decided waves of the thick beard, and the broad shoulders, which indicated strength indeed, but certainly did not suggest elegance. He paced along the whole length of the corridor, mechanically stroking his beard with his hand according to his habit,—and when he had reached the furthest end, that led to the landing with the painted door, he turned and retraced his steps. He was taking his nightly promenade—and because his room was just above the one where the Councillor's widow and her child were sleeping he had selected this lonely place, where he could walk up and down as he pleased without the danger of disturbing any one. What made him thus restless? Was he studying out some intricate scientific



problem, or was he haunted by the image of her for whose sake he had condemned himself to 'a life of loneliness?'

Felicitas thoughtfully closed the window, and drew before it the old green curtains, which had from time immemorial sheltered the dreams of the cooks in the House of Hellwig.

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## CHAPTER XVII.

ON the lawn, in the garden outside of the town, in the shade of the chestnut trees, the grass was freshly mown—a delicious healthy odour exhaled from the heaps of new hay—and upon one of them little Anna was lying in great comfort. Felicitas leaned against the trunk of the largest chestnut—it had always been her favourite. How often she had climbed it as a child when not only the garden beneath her but the whole beautiful world seemed to her flower-strewn! Her gaze sought the shady arch above her, where the boughs were stretching boldly and powerfully forth in every direction. Inside of the rough bark warm life was pulsing,—the healthy sap ascended and streamed into every leaf and twig that stretched itself abroad into the world far from the parent stem, which must have wondered at its offspring's vagaries, for they trembled in every breeze, rustled and moaned when rough winds swept over them, and drooped exhausted beneath the hot rays of the sun,—but whatever trembling and moaning and sighing went on above, the old trunk stood firm. How is it with the human soul when the storms of fate sweep over it? It lies prostrate beneath them.



This gloomy thought, trite and true as it sounds, was not exactly verified in the case of the girl who is just pondering upon it, and whose white forehead at this moment stands out in such lovely contrast with the rugged trunk against which she is leaning. This young creature, so full of sensibility and sympathy, had braved storms which would have shattered in the dust hundreds of her sex. Perhaps the sad reflection was induced by some unconscious dread,—some shadowy presentiment of a coming evil which would prostrate and crush even her iron will. How little do we understand, how little are we conscious of the processes going on in our own minds! Not until after the occurrence of some great misfortune do we recur to the mysterious warnings that foreshadowed it to us.

Two days had passed since the departure of the Professor and the Councillor's widow upon their expedition to the Thuringian forest. The former entered the travelling carriage with the air of a man who is shaking off a heavy burden, which he most willingly bequeathes to the good little town of X——. In the hall he had shaken hands with Heinrich, Rosa, and the old cook, who all ran to say 'Good-by;' but he passed Felicitas with a slight bow, touching the broad brim of his hat, as cool and indifferent as though her lips had never uttered a harsh word to him, as if the eyes which had so often flashed defiance at him were those of a stranger. 'That was sensible, and as it should be,' thought Felicitas, with tightly-compressed lips. The young widow sat opposite to him. She had hovered past the assembled household like a fairy in the middle of a blue cloud, and her charming face beneath her straw hat beamed as if with the certainty of long-desired enjoyment.



It was the second afternoon that Felicitas had been allowed to spend with little Anna in the garden. They had been peaceful hours, and not only that, they had had another and most agreeable, not to say remarkable result. The next garden, separated from the Hellwig garden only by a low green hedge, had a few days previously come into the possession of the Franz family. The day before the young lawyer had exchanged salutations and a few courteous words with her across the hedge, and to-day an old lady, in black silk dress and snowy cap, had suddenly appeared and addressed her. It was the mother of young Franz, and a person more gentle and kindly could not have been imagined. She lived an exceedingly retired life, devoted to her husband and son, and was regarded with great respect by the entire town of X——. In view of Felicitas' speedy departure from the Hellwigs, she begged to offer any advice and assistance that the young girl might need. What a ray of sunlight upon the path of the despised player's child! And yet Felicitas was leaning against the trunk of the old chestnut-tree, lost in melancholy reverie. A light wind whispered in the branches above her head—she smiled sadly—their rustling sounded to her like an echo from a lost Eden. She thought of her early youth, now vanishing, and the whispering seemed to warn her that she was called upon to struggle and contend in the life just opening before her. But it did not warn her that at this very moment fate was preparing a crushing blow, which would well-nigh utterly blast all her hopes for the future.

A few minutes before, Heinrich had entered the garden—he seemed about to rush up to Felicitas with the greatest precipitation, but he had suddenly disappeared behind a cypress wall. Now he came slowly forward. At the first sight of that broad, honest face, working with some



violent agitation, she knew that he brought evil tidings. She sprang towards him, and seized his hand anxiously.

"Oh, Fay, I cannot help you. You must know it soon," he said, in a voice of despair, brushing the back of his hard hand across his heated brow, and turning away his eyes. "You know, my poor child, 'tis the way of the world."

"Go on!" she interrupted him harshly, almost with a scream, as she clenched her teeth convulsively.

"But no—Heaven take pity on us! if you are going to do so, how shall I ever tell you? The old Mam'selle——"

"Is dead!" she shrieked.

"Not yet, Fay, not yet; but indeed it is almost over—she is unconscious—she has had a stroke. And, oh, my God! she was all alone. Her maid found her lying on the floor in the room with her birds; she had just carefully attended to the poor little creatures." His voice failed him, and he cried like a child.

For a moment Felicitas stood as if paralyzed; every drop of blood forsook her pale cheeks; mechanically she pressed her hands upon her throbbing temples, but there came not a single tear. For one moment a bitter smile hovered upon her lips, then with unnatural composure she took up her straw hat which was lying upon one of the mounds of hay, called Rosa, who was sewing in the shade of the acacias, and delivered the child into her charge.

"Are you ill?" asked the maid. The statue-like appearance—the unnatural rigidity of the girl's pallid features frightened her.

"Yes, she is ill," Heinrich answered in Felicitas' stead, as she walked hurriedly toward the garden gate.

"Oh, Fay! take care what you do," he said, as he walked part of the way by her side,—*"Madame is with*



her; 'tis a good thing that the old Mam'selle cannot know it. Dr. Boehm has gone away,—he can do nothing, nothing more. And that it should have happened to-day! Ah, what an unlucky child you are!”

Felicitas did not hear what he was saying,—the words struck her ear, but conveyed no meaning to her mind, just as one might meet people in the street and not know it. Unseen by Frederika she entered the house and ran up-stairs. On the topmost landing she threw her hat on the ground. The door of the bird-room was ajar,—it resounded with shrill chirpings. How carefully this door had always been closed, that no fugitive might escape! Now she passed in without closing it. The forsaken little creatures had better seek for food beneath heaven's expanse—they had lost their kind protectress!

She entered the large sitting-room, and from the adjoining cabinet issued the inflexible monotonous voice of Madame, and filled the room that had for so many years resounded only to the language of music, and to the rare words that fell from the lips of kindly, peaceful age. The great lady was reading, in a loud voice, one of those old Calvinistic hymns, which, composed for an age and a class of men entirely wanting in intellectual culture, have lost all meaning if looked upon as interpretations of the devotional sentiment of to-day. How utterly incongruous it seemed, that those rough rhymes, strung together so rudely, and abounding in coarse material imagery, should have been selected to arouse and soothe the dying consciousness of one who had, during her whole long life, paid the truest homage to the Beautiful, and who recognized the Creator always in the beauty and love manifested in his works!

Noiselessly as a shadow, Felicitas glided into the room. Frau Hellwig read on without seeing her. There, be-



death the white curtains of the bed, which fluttered gently like wings in the breeze from the open window, as if they were waiting to receive and bear aloft the parting soul, lay a pale, pale face. Oh, how cruel death is, when, before snatching our dear ones from us to be seen no more on earth, he robs the well-known faces of their kindly loving looks, so that we see only what inspires us almost with terror, where we have found hitherto only sympathy and affection!

The eyelids were not yet quite closed. The eyes rolled from side to side, and a low rattle was heard with every deep-drawn breath,—now and then the right arm was slightly lifted, only to fall again helplessly upon the covering of the bed. What a fearful sight for Felicitas, for whom the last ray of love that had lighted her life was about to be extinguished! She stepped up to the side of the bed. Frau Hellwig raised her eyes from her hymn-book, and great indeed was her astonishment as she saw the pale, tearless face which was bending above the dying woman.

“What are you doing here? insolent creature!” she asked, in a loud, harsh voice, while she raised her large hand and pointed towards the door.

Felicitas did not answer,—but the sudden cessation of the reading appeared to make some impression upon the dying woman. She seemed to try to fix her wandering gaze,—it fell upon Felicitas. For a moment there shot forth a ray of joyful recognition,—her lips moved, but no sound issued from them,—there was an evident painful struggle to say something, and yet the strong will compelled once more the service of the broken physical mechanism,—“Bring a lawyer” issued thickly but distinctly from her lips.

Felicitas instantly left the room. There was no time



to be lost. She flew along the passage,—but just as she was passing the open door of the bird-room, she felt herself violently impelled from behind by two strong hands, which pushed her with a sudden shock into the middle of the room, and then closed and bolted the door behind her. A startling clamour arose around her, the terrified birds flew hither and thither in the noisiest and most bewildering confusion. Felicitas had stumbled and fallen in the middle of the room, dragging down with her one of the fir-trees. What had happened? She arose and put back her hair, which had fallen loosely around her face. She had seen no one, had heard no footstep behind her, and yet some one had certainly been there, and thrust her in there with demoniac force just at a moment when she was about to fulfil the request of a dying woman, and when every instant of delay burdened her soul with a fearful weight of responsibility.

She rushed to the door, but it was firmly bolted,—she knocked, and rattled the latch, but the loud noise made by the birds drowned all other sounds. The terrified little creatures wheeled above her head, flew wildly against the walls, and were scarcely pacified when the young girl dropped her hands at her sides and stood still in utter despair. Who would open the door for her? Certainly not the hands which had just bolted it upon her! She knew that iron grasp only too well; it was the grasp of the same hand which had just been holding the hymn-book; the book had been thrown aside that the young girl might thus violently be prevented from fulfilling her errand, and now the terrible woman was again sitting by the dying-bed, and her voice was again heard reading in the same loud monotonous tones. She could, without emotion, suffer the dying woman to struggle with and prolong the death agony in the vain hope



of still performing some last act of benevolence. Poor Aunt Cordula! She left the world, where she had led so lonely a life, with no pleasant farewell glimpse of it. The last impressions that her parting soul received were of religious fanaticism in the person of the woman whom she had loathed, and of the proverbial ingratitude of the world, which Felicitas must have seemed to exemplify. At this last thought the blood rushed to the young girl's head. She was beside herself, and attempted with redoubled vigour to force the door—in vain. Why was she locked up here? Aunt Cordula had told her to bring a lawyer—had she a last confession to make? No, no, the old Mam'selle had nothing to confess! If she had borne the burden of guilt during her life, it was the guilt of others,—a burden fast falling from her now. This much had become gradually clear to Felicitas in her intercourse with Aunt Cordula,—that the old Mam'selle might be the repository, but never the accomplice, of some guilty secret. Perhaps she had wished to dispose of her property, and had thus been prevented by Madame's violence. If Aunt Cordula died without a will, her entire property would revert to the Hellwig family,—who knows how many poor suffering human beings these moments of delay might rob of their future support, while the storehouses and coffers of the merchant's family, already wealthy, would receive new accessions through Madame's cunning.

Felicitas went to the window and looked around upon the neighbouring houses, anxiously searching for some human form which might respond to her cry for help, but all were too far beneath her,—she could neither be heard nor seen. How her pulses throbbed with agony of mind and feverish excitement! She threw herself into the only chair in the room and burst into tears of despair.



At all events it would now be too late, even if she were released at this moment. Perhaps the dear eyes in the next room were already closed, and the heart, which must have looked with such anxiety for Felicitas' return, had throbbed its last.

The young girl's keen quick mind could find no consolation in the almost universal belief that the transfigured soul was at this moment conscious of all that had prevented the fulfilment of its last earthly desire. It is hard to believe that the human soul, which, like everything that God's wisdom has created, obeys the law of gradual progress, and passes through countless phases before arriving at perfection, immediately upon release from its earthly prison,—is endowed with the Divine attribute of omniscience, and from beyond the grave reads like an open book all the actions and secret motives of those whom it leaves behind.

Nearly two hours had been passed in her prison—consumed in gloomy reflection and despairing efforts to accomplish her release. The place grew hateful to her. These senseless creatures which she had once delighted in, but which renewed their wild fluttering and shrill chirpings at every movement that she made, seemed to her excited fancy like supernatural existences,—she trembled at her own motions. The evening was falling, and twilight crept into the gloomy room—her heart was throbbing with its first wild pain for her dear lost friend—her senses seemed to be forsaking her! Once more she ran to the door, and paused, overcome with amazement,—the latch yielded easily to her touch. Without, in the passage, deathlike silence reigned. Felicitas could almost have believed herself the victim of some frightful dream, if the door of the sitting-room had not been locked. Through the keyhole a strong draught of air was blowing



—she heard the rustle of the ivy upon the walls within—they had opened the window—all then was over, over!

Below, in the front mansion, the old cook sat knitting at the open street door as was her custom, on fair summer afternoons. From the kitchen came a strong smell of freshly-baked bread,—she had just taken from the oven a huge panful of the little biscuits which Madame liked to eat with her coffee. Everything down here was going on in its accustomed routine, while above, a member of the family had just left the world.

Felicitas went into the servants' room. Soon after Heinrich entered. He hung his cap on its peg and then silently walked up to Felicitas and held out his hand without a word. His old weather-beaten face looked unutterably sad, and his eyes were red with weeping; the sight of him was a relief to the paralyzed heart of the young girl,—she sprang up, threw her arms around his neck, and burst into a passion of tears.

“Didn’t you see her again, Fay?” he asked gently, after a pause. “Frederika says Madame closed her eyes—with those hands—that had never been kind to her! Of course you were out of the question—we all know how it would have enraged Madame if she had caught the slightest glimpse of you up there. But where have you been all this time?”

Felicitas’ tears had ceased to flow. With flashing eyes she told him of what had taken place. He walked up and down the room like one possessed.

“Can such things be possible!” he cried again and again, running his thick hard fingers continually through his coarse, bushy gray hair. “And could our Father in Heaven allow it? Oh, Merciful Powers! If you should go before a magistrate, and tell it all, and accuse her, you’d be sent directly home again because you have no



witnesses, and no one in the whole town would believe you, for she is the pious, worthy Frau Hellwig—and you,—Ah, she's a sly one!" he interrupted himself with a grim laugh. "Just when the birds were screeching loudest she softly unbolted the door again. Yes, yes! I always knew it, she's a perfect limb! And Fay, my poor child, she has robbed you. This morning the old Mam'selle sent me to request her lawyer to come to her—to-morrow afternoon she was going to make her will—for your sake. Oh, yes, 'Who knows how soon my death may come?'—she was cleverer than any of us—and would have shamed many a learned man with her wisdom, but she had never learned that verse of the hymn by heart, or she would not have put it off so long!"

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## CHAPTER XVIII.

It was quite early the next morning when Frau Hellwig appeared in the court-yard. She wore a black lace cap instead of the stiff white muslin one, the style of which had been unchanged for so many years. The worldly woman, who had so often desecrated the Sabbath of the Lord with her songs and frivolities, was dead,—even the form which had been the abode of that spirit of levity had vanished from the old house. The body had been already removed the previous evening to the undertaker's. But in spite of all this, the dead woman had borne the name of Hellwig, and therefore Madame wore the black cap, and the crape collar which to-day replaced the stiff, white linen strip that usually surrounded her throat.



She unlocked the door behind which Felicitas had once seen the old Mam'selle disappear. Besides the well-known flight of stairs behind the painted door, another narrow winding staircase led directly up to the old Mam'selle's dwelling from the steep street without. Here Heinrich and her maid had always found entrance and egress.

The marble busts still looked down unchanged from their brackets, but the genius of the place had fled from the room which Madame now entered with the air of a possessor. A cold, contemptuous smile hovered about her lips as she passed through the little suite of rooms, each of which revealed in its tasteful arrangement the poetic mind, the gentle spirit of its former inhabitant; but she contracted her brows with an expression of hate as her glance rested upon the rows of volumes in their costly morocco bindings upon the shelves of the various book-cases—those books which bore the names of the poets and authors who had been the old Mam'selle's favourites.

She picked up a large bunch of keys which was lying upon the table and opened a desk, apparently the most interesting article of furniture in the room to her. The most thorough order reigned in all the drawers and boxes. She opened each and took out bundles of letters, yellow with age, and tied with faded ribbon, and piles of manuscript. The large white hands thrust them back again impatiently—what interest could all that 'trash' have for Madame?—she was not curious. But a box, containing deeds and legal documents, was treated much more respectfully. With the greatest care and an expression of much inward satisfaction Frau Hellwig unfolded paper after paper. She was an excellent arithmetician. In a very few moments she had counted, added, and multiplied.



and was entire mistress of the amount of the old Mam'selle's property,—it exceeded her expectations.

But she was by no means at the end of her search,—she now examined the contents of all the different closets, wardrobes and trunks, and as she proceeded, she became more hurried and impatient. Gradually her face grew flushed,—her clumsy figure wandered from room to room,—her hands rumaged recklessly in the linen-presses—tossed about the delicately folded laces and caps of the departed, and moved the porcelain and glass in the cupboards so carelessly that they rang again,—but what she sought was not to be found. At last, greatly irritated, she stepped out into the gallery. With her clumsy, awkward movements she overthrew several flower-pots, and scattered flowers and leaves in every direction,—but she paid no attention to the mischief that she was doing—she was too much preoccupied even to bestow her usual amount of contempt upon the ‘useless trash.’

Frederika was feeding her fowls below. Frau Hellwig called down to her to send up Heinrich, and stepping back into the rooms, began her search anew.

“Do you know where the old Mam'selle kept her silver?” she asked, addressing Heinrich immediately upon his entrance. “She must have had a great deal,—I know about it from my mother-in-law. There were at least two dozen heavy large spoons, and the same number of heavily gilt teaspoons, besides silver candlesticks, a coffee-pot, and a cream pitcher.” The enumeration rolled glibly from off her tongue as though it had been well committed to memory. “I can find none of these articles,—where can they be?”

“I do not know, Madame,” replied Heinrich quietly. He stepped up to a table, opened a box upon it, and took out two silver dishes. “This is all the silver of the old



Mam'selle's that I have ever seen," he said,—“I had to clean it often, for the maid did not make it bright enough.”

Frau Hellwig bit her lips and walked heavily up and down the room. The stern reserve which she usually retained before her servants forsook her for a moment.

“It will be a fine thing—a perfect shame—if the old woman has sold this valuable family silver, or perhaps—given it away,—it would have been just like her!” she continued as if to herself. “She had diamonds too—some very beautiful jewellery—everything which the Hellwig family ever possessed of the kind, was divided between her and my mother-in-law.” She paused suddenly, and her eyes rested upon the old cabinet with the glass doors that held the portfolios of music. She had not yet searched that.

The lower part of this cabinet was closed by massive doors of richly carved wood. She tore open these, and searched the shelves, which were filled with carefully-arranged magazines and periodicals.

The hard malicious smile appeared on her face, disclosing her strong well-preserved teeth. She dragged out one pile after another, throwing them with such haste upon the floor that the single sheets flew all about the room.

The old servant was boiling with rage. He clenched his fists and looked savagely at the Vandal. He had brought all those papers and pamphlets from the post himself,—they had been the intellectual food of the old Mam'selle,—how well he remembered the sparkle of her kindly eyes as he laid a new book upon her table!

“These are all arch-enemies of our church!” she muttered. “These blasphemous sheets!—these devilish inventions! Yes, yes, she has led a life of sin, the misera-



ble old maid!—and I have been forced for so many years to endure this ungodly creature beneath my roof!”

She arose and looked through the glass doors of the cabinet. At sight of the music a sort of harsh discordant laugh broke from her. She opened the doors, and told Heinrich to bring a clothes-basket, into which she ordered him to put all the music-books and portfolios filled with notes. Heinrich racked his brain with guessing what was to be the fate of these beautiful books which had so often lain upon the piano, and from which the old Mam'selle had read such exquisite music. Madame stood beside him and took care that not a scrap was left behind; she herself did not touch a single sheet—it almost seemed as if she were afraid they would burn her fingers.

Then she ordered the old servant to carry the basket down stairs. She carefully locked all the doors in these rooms, and followed him. To the vexation of Frederika, who always dreaded her visits, she went into the kitchen, where Heinrich deposited his burden and was then sent into the sitting-room for a paper-knife. The old cook had just made up a blazing fire.

“You will not need so much wood to-day, Frederika,” said Madame, throwing one of the loose sheets into the flames. The beautiful portfolio containing the old Mam'selle's costly collection of autographs lay upon the top of the basket. The silk ribbons with which it was tied together were loosened one after the other by Madame's large determined fingers, and ah! how eagerly the blazing fire devoured them! There a red flame played around the name of ‘Glück’—the notes of a brilliant cadenza of Cimarosa's glowed like fiery pearls,—all, Italian, German, and French, enveloped in the same burning shroud, sunk peacefully to rest.

Heinrich stood looking on at first in utter bewilder-



ment, choking with rage. The body of his dead friend was not yet consigned to the earth, and this unfeeling woman was already abusing and destroying what had belonged to her—more roughly than a common soldier in a hostile country.

“But, Madame,” he said at last, “perhaps there is a will!”

Frau Hellwig looked up at him. Her face, scarlet with the heat of the fire, expressed mingled displeasure and contempt.

“Since when have I allowed you to utter your opinions in my presence?” she asked sharply. In her hand she held the manuscript operetta of Bach’s which the old Mam’selle had lately declared to be worth its weight in gold, as it was the only copy in existence. With increased energy and a singular look upon her countenance, she cut and tore at the leaves, thrusting them all into the hottest part of the fire.

At this moment the bell at the street door rang loudly. Heinrich went to open it. An official, accompanied by a lawyer, entered. He bowed to Madame, who came from the kitchen in much surprise, while he introduced himself as the legal commissary, who had been sent to seal up the property of the deceased Cordula Hellwig, spinster.

Perhaps for the first time in her life Frau Hellwig lost her iron self-possession and presence of mind.

“Seal up?” she stammered.

“She has left a will with her lawyer.”

“That must be a mistake,” she returned. “I know for a certainty that according to her father’s will she was powerless to make one,—her property all reverts to the Hellwig family.”

“I am very sorry,” said the official, shrugging his



shoulders. "The will exists, and although I greatly regret being obliged to trouble you, my duty compels me to persist, and place seals upon her effects immediately."

Frau Hellwig bit her lips, took the keys of the rooms under the roof, and preceded the unwelcome visitors. But Heinrich ran up-stairs exultingly to Felicitas, who was fulfilling her duties as nurse—although, to Anna's amazement, she sat mute and stiff as a statue to-day beside her chattering little charge. The old servant told her all that had happened. At his description of the *auto da fé* she started up.

"Were they single sheets that she burnt?" she asked in a choking voice.

"Yes, single sheets. They were all in blue portfolios, tied with beautiful ribbons——"

She did not wait to hear any more, but hurried down to the kitchen. There stood the basket, it still contained some music and some exercises for the piano, but the portfolios were lying open and defaced upon the brick floor, not a sheet of their contents remained. The draught had blown out of the fire a little scrap of paper which was lying upon the hearth. Felicitas picked it up,—"*The MS. composition of Johann Sebastian Bach, written by his own hand, and received from him as a remembrance, 1707. Gotthelf v. Hirschsprung,*" she read with streaming eyes. It was the last remains of the mysterious manuscript. The melodies were hushed forever!

Apparently, Frau Hellwig had not intended at first that her son's pleasure-trip should be interrupted on account of the death of the old Mam'selle, but when the business of sealing up was over, from which she returned in an extremely provoked and irritated mood, she wrote a hasty note recalling him. For, according to Aunt Cordula's directions, her will was to be read the day after



the funeral. To enable her to listen to it Madame needed some support, she had never in her life seemed to possess so little self-reliance. The terrible idea of the probable loss of a considerable property which she had always regarded as eventually her own, had a most depressing effect even upon her iron nerves.

The pleasure party had started without any definite plans as to where they should first proceed. The programme was: 'a pleasure excursion wherever we please, with pleasant halts where the woods are greenest.' And accordingly Frau Hellwig could not direct her letter with any precision. The search that Madame had begun in the rooms under the roof she now continued in her deceased husband's study. Surely among the family papers the proof could be found that the old Mam'selle had no right to will away her inheritance as she pleased. Perhaps indeed her own savings had accumulated. Madame had suspected as much on the previous evening, and had trusted in the bolt of the bird-room to preserve these savings also to the Hellwigs. But although Madame pondered and tried to remember, she could not recall or discover why the conviction was so strong in her mind that Aunt Cordula had no control over the disposition of her inheritance. Whether she remembered it as a direction in the will of Cordula Hellwig's father, or whether she had been assured of it upon sufficient authority, she did not know, but convinced she was; and there must be papers in existence which would reveal why, and which she must search for. She searched and read until the perspiration stood upon her pale forehead,—to-day was an unlucky day—the afternoon's exertions, like those of the morning, were entirely without result. Fortune usually delights to cast her roses at the feet of cold-blooded, calculating, unimaginative people—it seems al-



most as if she thought her treasures less safe with richly endowed, generous natures, than with those whose souls are as tightly closed as their money-bags. Madame had hitherto been one of fortune's favourites, and was all the more provoked and surprised by this unlucky day.

Two days had passed. Madame's letter was apparently travelling in the well-crammed mail-bag through the green valleys of the Thuringian forest, and the old Mam'selle was borne to her last resting-place, without one of the name of Hellwig to see her coffin laid in the ground.

Felicitas bore her sorrow silently with that self-control which belongs to strong natures. She did not know the weakness that finds consolation for grief in constantly speaking of it. From her childhood she had been accustomed to struggle through every trial alone and to let her inward wounds bleed sorely, without allowing those around her to suspect their existence. She purposely avoided looking upon the dead face of her dear old friend. The last conscious glance of the dying woman had been a farewell look—she would have no memory of that dear face uninformed by the light of life. But on the afternoon of the day of the funeral, when Frau Hellwig had gone out, she took down a key which was hanging in the servants' room,—it unlocked the corridor upon which opened the old lumber room, which the reader has already seen. Madame's increase in size and weight during the last few years had made her very averse to mounting the upper flights of stairs, and the keys to the upper rooms had consequently been handed over to the cook, who had free ingress here.

Aunt Cordula must and should have fresh flowers laid upon her grave—but only those which she herself had nourished. The rooms under the roof were all, with the



exception of the bird-room, locked and sealed up, and there was therefore no way of getting through the house to the flower-garden, which the carelessness of the officials had thus left exposed to neglect. After nine years, Felicitas now stood once more at the window of the garret-room, and looked across to the flowers on the roof. How much lay between that wretched day, when her wounded childish heart had rebelled against God and man, and to day! Over there she had found a home. The lonely occupant of those rooms had taken the despised player's child to her large, noble woman's heart, and had warded off every blow from her with the weapons of her cultivated intellect. There the child had studied diligently, and a new life of the mind had opened before her. He who was at present wandering through the Thuringian forest with a brilliant party of friends, did not dream that his wonderful schemes—based upon narrow prejudices and false views of duty—would be made of no avail by two little feet tripping lightly along those tumble-down gutters on the edge of the roofs.

And now she must tread that path again. Felicitas got out of the window and walked bravely across—the firm even floor of the gallery was soon beneath her feet. Those poor flowers which were so unconsciously waving their heads in the gentle breeze were far worse off than the lilies in the fields. Magically suspended in air, as it were, they knew nothing of the nourishing soil—nothing of the warm, fresh mother-earth which takes to its kindly heart the tenderest fibres of the most delicate flowers, as well as the gnarled roots of the mightiest oak—their weal or woe had depended upon two little withered white hands, which were now folded under ground, and would soon crumble into dust. The orphaned plants could not yet know their loss—it had lately rained several times



in the night, and they were flourishing and blooming gorgeously.

Felicitas pressed her face against the panes of the glass door and looked into the room. There stood the little round table—the knitting lay in a basket upon it, as though it had just been put down to be resumed immediately. Directly across an open book lay the spectacles—Felicitas could read the page which was open—the last intellectual pleasure which the old Mam'selle had had in this world had been Antony's speech, in Shakspeare's Julius Cæsar. There stood the beloved piano, and on one side glimmered the glass panes of the old cabinet, but the shelves were empty—the old piece of furniture had proved but a faithless guardian of its musical treasures, which it had yielded up to the ruthless despoiler, and which were now devoured by the flames; but it had tightly clutched other treasures. Madame had sought in vain for the old Mam'selle's silver, and——Felicitas suddenly started. The secret depository in the cabinet contained not the silver only—in one corner was a little gray pasteboard box. "It must die before me," Aunt Cordula had said,—*was* it destroyed? It was on no account to fall into the hands of her heirs, and yet how averse she had been to consign it to destruction herself! It was more than probable that it was yet in existence. If the will revealed where the silver was to be found, possibly a secret might come to light which Aunt Cordula had guarded from the whole world with iron determination—this must never be.

The glass door was bolted from within. Felicitas, without a moment's hesitation, broke one of the panes, and felt for the bolt. It was not slipped—the door had been locked and the key taken from the keyhole—a disheartening discovery. A passionate impatience took pos-



session of the young girl at the thought that fate always stepped in to prevent any service that she wished to render Aunt Cordula. There was now, mingled with her grief for the departed, anxiety for the future. Could the contents of the little gray box effectually crush all whispers of any guilt attached to the old Mam'selle? Or might they not be sufficiently incomprehensible and mysterious to cast a darker shadow upon her memory?

She hastily gathered a large bouquet, put two jars of auriculas, Aunt Cordula's favourite flowers, into her basket, and retraced her steps across the roof, with a much heavier heart than she had brought with her.

And now she had three graves in the large quiet grave-yard. The earth covered those who had loved her, and to whom her warm heart had clung with the fondest affection. She looked bitterly towards heaven when she had strewn and planted the flowers upon Aunt Cordula's grave. There was no one left now to be taken from her. Her father must have been long dead—his bones were crumbling in some foreign land,—here, upon a marble monument, was the name in gilt letters, '*Friedrich Hellwig*,' and there—she walked over to her mother's grave, which, thanks to the tender kindness of the old Mam'selle, had for the last nine years been covered with exquisite flowers as soon as spring opened. To-day the head-stone was lying upon the ground. Heinrich had declared a short time before that the letters upon it needed renewing, and probably the stone had been taken up by his orders. It had before sunk so deep into the ground that the name could be deciphered only with difficulty, but now of course every letter was plain enough. '*Meta d'Orlowska*,' Felicitas read, her sight dimmed by tears,—but there was another name below it, which had hitherto been entirely covered with earth. The black colour of the letters was



of course faded,—but they were cut in the sandstone, and *geb. von Hirschsprung, from Kiel,* could be deciphered without trouble.

Felicitas sunk into a reverie. This was the name which had been written upon Bach's manuscript,—and it had also been borne by the noble Thuringian family whose crest was so often found carved upon the walls of the old merchant's mansion,—the little silver seal too, which Felicitas had discovered in her embroidered pouch long ago, showed the same leaping stag,—what a riddle it all was! The haughty race whose crest it had been, and whose last scions had been driven by poverty to spade and hoe, had utterly vanished. Heinrich had known the last one of the name,—he had been a student at Leipzig, and had died young, and unmarried. And yet, fourteen years before, a young creature from the far north had appeared here whose maiden name was the same. Had a branch been torn from the old Thuringian parent stem to take root in a distant country? Let the haughty knight whose enduring image gazed upon the altered world from the walls of the Hellwig mansion rise from his leaden coffin and wander over this grave-yard: various stones bear his name carved upon them, and beneath them are resting men with labour's hard horny hands, men who earned their bread in the sweat of their brows, although he left behind him the parchment rolls which should confirm the rights and claims of his family to all eternity, and closed his eyes in the unshaken delusion that the lofty blood, the aristocratic hands of his posterity could never be degraded by hard labour. Let him stand by this grave which covers a daughter of his house who had wandered hither from afar. The bread that she ate was bitter indeed. Hers was a despised calling, and had destroyed her blooming body. How incomprehensible are



the changes which, in the history of an individual family as well as of the world, show here heaven-ascending heights and there yawning abysses, which a few years may once more level and connect!

Were any of Felicitas' relatives still living? The young girl, when she asked herself this question, replied with a bitter smile, at all events they did not exist for the daughter of Meta von Hirschsprung. They had been twice publicly appealed to and had not responded. Perhaps this branch of the old race had preserved its original purity until the time when a daughter of the house bestowed her heart and hand upon the juggler and was rejected and ignored forever by all with whom she was connected. So much was certain—her child would never cross the threshold of those who could publicly disclaim all relationship to the juggler's wife.

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## CHAPTER XIX.

FELICITAS, after leaving the grave-yard, did not return directly to the house on the market-square. Rosa and Anna were awaiting her in the garden, whither Frau Hellwig was also coming later in the afternoon, to take the evening meal beneath the shade of the acacias. Madame had apparently recovered her outward composure; the only change in her was that she went out much more frequently than formerly. She seemed to feel the necessity of some variety and distraction in her life while waiting for her son's return.

She appeared to desire to ignore entirely her meeting



with Felicitas by the old Mam'selle's bedside. She had evidently not suspected the young girl's previous intimacy with Aunt Cordula, but had regarded Felicitas' intrusion as the result of curiosity, which would most certainly have met with a severe rebuke under other circumstances, but was passed over without further allusion in view of the subsequent occurrences of that afternoon, which were best forgotten as soon as possible.

Felicitas had made almost the entire circuit of the little town, and now stopped before a garden-gate. She drew a long breath, and then with quick decision lifted the latch and opened it. It led into the garden belonging to the Franz family. The young girl had now been thrown back entirely upon her own resources. Although her heart was torn and bleeding, her inward suffering had no effect upon her hard-won decision of character. The heavy blows of misfortune could not long paralyze the clear understanding which confronted the inevitable with calmness; the mists of sensibility and enthusiasm had never for one moment clouded her reason.

The gentle distinguished old lady in the white cap who had accosted Felicitas a few days before was sitting writing in a shady arbour. She instantly recognized her visitor, and beckoned to her to approach.

"Ah, here comes my young neighbour, and wants some good advice, does she not?" she asked with winning kindness, making room for the young girl on the seat beside her. Felicitas told her that at the end of three weeks she should leave the Hellwigs, and be in need of some employment.

"Will you tell me, my child, what duties you can undertake!" asked the lady, regarding Felicitas kindly with the large honest eyes which reminded one vividly of her son's. The girl blushed scarlet. At last she must speak



of her long-guarded secret, and display her accomplishments and attainments as a peddler does his wares. It was a painful duty, and yet it must be done.

"I think I can give thorough instruction in French and German, in geography and history," she replied with hesitation. "I have also had excellent instruction in drawing. I am not a thorough musician, although I could teach the rudiments of singing,"—her hearer's eyes opened wide with astonishment—"and then I can cook, wash, and iron, and if need be, scrub." These last accomplishments came much more glibly from the young girl's tongue than the first had done.

"You do not certainly wish to remain here in our good little town of X——?" asked the lady with interest.

"I cannot say that I wish to stay here for any length of time, but there are graves here that are very dear to me. I cannot leave them immediately."

"Well, then, let me tell you something. My sister's dame de compagnie in D—— is going to be married; her place will be vacant in about six months. I can easily procure it for you, and until then you must stay here with me. Do you consent?"

Felicitas, overcome with surprise and gratitude, kissed the kind old lady's hand, but then stood up and looked wistfully into her eyes. It was evident that some request was hovering upon her lips; the old lady instantly noticed it.

"There is something else on your mind, my child. If we are to be together for a time, we must be open and candid with each other. Come, tell me what it is," she said encouragingly.

"I wish to ask you to give me a *definite* office in your household, even although it should be a most menial



one, and only undertaken for a few months," Felicitas answered hastily and with decision.

"Ah, I understand! You are tired of eating bread which is indeed hardly-earned, and which—let us be frank—is notwithstanding looked upon as given in charity."

Felicitas assented.

"Well, you shall occupy no such humiliating position in my house, you dear proud child. I now engage you as my companion. You certainly shall not wash and iron and scrub; but you must undertake a general superintendence of the household, and give the orders in the kitchen, for I and my old Dora are growing feeble together. Will you not?"

"Ah, how gladly!" For the first time since Aunt Cordula's death a happy smile hovered about the grave young face.

A delicate sunbeam that had played up and down upon the shady walk in front of the arbour was suddenly extinguished—the sun was declining. Felicitas remembered that she must be at her post in the garden when Frau Hellwig arrived, and therefore begged leave to retire. The old lady dismissed her with a warm pressure of the hand, and a few minutes afterward she stood in the adjoining garden with little Anna in her arms. Frederika shortly appeared; she carried a heavy basket of crockery, and looked greatly heated.

"They came an hour ago," she cried quite out of breath, and very much out of temper, as she deposited her burden on the ground. "The fact is, everything is turned topsyturvy with us now. Madame told me when she saw the carriage coming across the Square that I must get everything ready to stay in the town this afternoon. Just as I have got everything in order, as she told me the Pro-



fessor insists upon going out to the garden here, and so I had to pack up everything and drag out."

Then she rushed away to the beds to cut a few heads of salad.

"Oh, they've had a time there, I can tell you—a disgraceful time!" she said in a low voice as Felicitas stood by her in the kitchen dressing the salad. "Madame would hardly say, 'how do you do?' she was so full of the story of the will. I'll tell you what, Caroline, I never have seen our Madame as raging as she was to-day in my whole life. And the young master talked like a fool all the time. He declared that the old aunt had been disowned by the family, who had never troubled themselves about her living or dying, and he could not see how people who despised her could pocket her money. The idea of her property had never entered his head. And whenever Madame stopped to take breath, he persisted in asking about the family, whether every one had been well during his absence. Oh, he looked queer enough; and there was the young widow with her dress as if the rats had gnawed it!"

As usual, Felicitas made no reply to the old cook's gossip. She took her sewing and sat down under the chestnut-tree, while little Anna played upon the grass at her side. Through a gap in the cypress wall that stretched like a curtain before her, she had a full view of the garden-gate. This gate, with its delicate cast-iron tracery framed in on each side by blooming wild rose-bushes, and opening into the garden from the avenue of dark-green lindens that stretched beyond it, had always possessed a mysterious charm for the young girl. How many forms had appeared and disappeared through this gate,—some kind friendly faces which she had once run joyfully to meet,—but others there had been, at sight of



which her heart was chilled, and behind which as they retreated the peculiar creaking, jarring noise of the closing gate had been music in her ears. Yet never had she so thrilled with sudden terror and strange pain as at this moment when Madame, leaning upon her son's arm, and followed by the Councillor's widow, entered the garden. What had she to fear from those people? Madame, for the most part, ignored her existence, and the man by her side had relinquished all attempt to convert her to his views—those views in accordance with which she was a despised outcast in the world.

Frederika had said he looked 'queer enough,' and Felicitas herself thought she remarked something strange in his appearance. No one could connect the idea of haste with the careless motions and air of indifference that characterized him in everyday life,—and yet it was the only word that Felicitas could have used in describing his present manner. He was evidently trying to walk quickly—an utter impossibility with his mother's clumsy figure hanging upon his arm,—and with head erect he scanned the entire garden,—naturally he was anxious to see his patient again.

Rosa came running along the paved walk to get little Anna, and Felicitas followed the two for a few steps that she might see from behind the first cypress screen the meeting between the mother and child. The Councillor's widow, 'tis true, took the child fondly in her arms, and kissed and patted its cheeks, but all the while she was scolding Rosa for having brought away the key of her room in her pocket so that she could not perform any toilette, but had to walk through the town in 'this horrid dress.' The becoming travelling-dress had indeed lost some of its original colour, and hung above the crinoline limp, and much bedraggled about the hem.



"Yes, to the very last this excursion has been, and I shall always maintain it, the most stupid expedition imaginable!" said the young widow peevishly, and pouting visibly as she drew together with a needle and thread a rent in the unfortunate dress. "I wish I had stayed at home with you, aunt, in your quiet room! We had a thousand unlucky accidents. Let me tell you, whichever way we went we came upon a shower of rain,—and then this cousin Bruin of mine was in such a bad humour all the time! You have no idea, aunt, how rude and—charming he was! He wanted to turn round and come back the very first day. And such trouble as we had to clear up his cloudy face now and then! Fräulein von Sternthal took up the matter with such intense interest, that I expected every minute she would either make him a declaration of love or extort one from him. Now say, John,—was she not all amiability and attention?"

Felicitas did not hear the Professor's reply. She had already returned to the chestnut-tree, and was sewing diligently in the hope that she might escape notice. They did not look pleasantly. The deep flush of violent excitement could still be seen upon Madame's cheeks,—and the ill humour that the journey had produced in her son seemed not to have been improved by his reception at home.

For awhile it appeared as though the lonely sempstress beneath the chestnut-tree would certainly be allowed to remain unmolested in her retirement; only once she lifted her eyes and saw through the gap in the cypress wall the figure of the Professor. He was sauntering down a gravel walk with his hands behind him, but the expression of his face contradicted the negligent indifference of his manner,—it was excited, expectant,—and he looked



searchingly down all the shady walks and behind the green old walls.

Felicitas sat still and watched him; involuntarily she laid her right hand upon her beating heart,—she was afraid of the moment when she should be discovered by him. More and more slowly he walked up the broad gravel path that encircled the lawn. His head was bare—was it his strange excited expression, or was the healthy colour gone from his cheeks?—the young girl thought him altered.

He reached above into the boughs of an apple-tree, bent down one of the branches, and looked with great interest at the growing fruit,—he could not have seen the girl beneath the chestnut-tree yet. The bough snapped up again, and he pursued his way. He was coming directly towards Felicitas,—he stopped and plucked something on the edge of the grass.

“See, Felicitas, it is a four-leaved clover,” he said quietly, without looking up. It sounded as unrestrained and easy as though his intercourse with her had never been interrupted or troubled, as though she would naturally be found sitting under the chestnut-tree,—but still, something in his manner chained her to the spot.

“Men say these four leaves bring good fortune to him who finds them,” he continued, coming quickly towards her. “Well, let me see now how much of the saying is pure superstition!”

He stood before her. In his bearing there was a certain tension, as if the man were summoning to his aid the whole force of his strong will. The clover leaf fell from his hands,—he stretched them both out to Felicitas.

“Good evening!” The voice vibrated which spoke these two common words. Oh, if he had only used this tone long ago to the child nine years old, whose passion-



ate little heart was longing for love and sympathy! To the sad brooding heart of the girl whom he had so long misunderstood, the confidential greeting which revealed unmistakably the delight of return, was too unintelligible. But she raised her hand, she, the Pariah, who had declared she would reject his aid even though he sought to save her from imminent death, for one moment placed her right hand in his,—overcome by some mysterious irresistible power. It was a kind of miracle, and as such he seemed to regard it—one unguarded look or motion, and it might fall from his grasp forever. With all the self-control that he could command, he took a different tone.

“Has little Anna given you much trouble?” he asked kindly and sympathizingly.

“On the contrary, the child’s dependent state touches me—I like to take care of her.”

“But you are paler than you were—and those melancholy lines around your mouth seem to me more deeply graven than before. You say the child’s dependent state touches you,—others are dependent, too, Felicitas! I will prove it to you. I am sure you have not wasted a thought upon those who fled from the little town of X——, seeking new strength for mind and body in the invigorating air of the wide forest?”

“I had neither time nor inclination for such thoughts,” she said, blushing deeply.

“I know it. But it was otherwise with me. I thought of you. Let me tell you when and where. I saw a noble young fir-tree growing all alone upon a rocky cliff, it looked as if it had been wounded and made sore in the forest at its feet, and had fled to this lonely height. There it stood fixed and gloomy, and my fancy lent it a human face, with familiar, proudly-disdainful eyes. A tempest arose, the rain drenched its branches, and the storm tossed



and beat it pitilessly, but after every attack it reared itself again and stood more proudly than before."

Felicitas raised her eyes and looked at him half-shyly, half-defiantly. He had come back strangely altered. This man with the cold steel gray eyes, the former devotee and ascetic, the ingrained conservative in whom law and the letter must have smothered every spark of poetic freedom—he, the pedant, who wearied of a song sung by a human voice, and was supposed to use his own only in the service of science, was telling her, in deep melodious tones, a kind of fairy story, composed by himself, and the significance of which she could not misunderstand.

"And only imagine," he continued, "there I stood in the valley watching it through the tempest, while my companions jeered my folly in not seeking safe shelter. But they did not know that the shy, awkward physician was contemplating a vision that no chilling rain or driving storm could banish or destroy. For he saw a bold traveller leave the wood below, climb up the lonely cliff, and throw his arms around the lofty fir, saying, 'You are mine!' And what happened then?——"

"I know what happened then," the girl interrupted him in a low, muttering tone, "the lonely tree was true to itself, and used the weapons which nature had provided it with."

"Even when it saw how he longed to take it close to his heart, Felicitas? Though it knew that it could rest there safe from all storms, and that he would cherish it tenderly as the apple of his eye all his life long?"

The narrator had evidently become inspired by a kind of passionate interest in the fate of these creatures of his fancy, for he spoke with quivering lips, and there awoke in his voice all those tones which had so touched Felicitas by the bedside of the sick child—but they were powerless now.



"The lonely tree must have known too well that he was telling it only fables," she replied coldly. "You say yourself that it braved the attacks of the storm—it must have been firm and strong, and could need no other support!"

It had not escaped her that he was growing deadly pale—for some seconds every trace of colour left his cheeks. He seemed about to turn and go away, but steps were heard approaching. He stood still close by Felicitas, and calmly awaited his mother, who stepped through the gap in the hedge upon the arm of his cousin.

"Well, upon my word, John," she remonstrated, "here you are, keeping Caroline from her work and letting us wait an unconscionable time for supper. Do you think I shall be pleased if the biscuit are overbaked?"

The Councillor's widow left her aunt's side and came across the grass to Felicitas. She was not looking as well as usual,—the light curls were hanging about her face in great disorder, she was flushed, and there was a malicious fire in her eyes.

"I have not yet thanked you, Caroline, for the care you have taken of little Anna in my absence," said she. The words should have been friendly, but the soft voice was sharper than usual, the tone was almost shrill. "But you are sitting there like a lonely hermit under the chestnut-tree—how could I know where you were? Have you often played this retiring, interesting part lately? It would explain in a measure my finding Anna upon my return so shamefully neglected. I have been scolding Rosa for it. Her hair has not been attended to at all, and her skin is so tanned that she looks like a Hottentot child, and I am afraid that she has overheated herself."

"Have you no other reproach for her nurse, Adele? Think for a moment!" said the Professor with a sneer.



"Perhaps it is her fault that your child is not healthy—possibly she was the cause of the showers in the Thuringian forest which have spoiled your temper, who knows——" he stopped, and turned away contemptuously.

"No, you had better not finish your sentence, John," said the young widow, struggling with tears of anger. "It seems to me that you don't care any more what you say to me. I did not mean to offend you, Caroline," she turned to the girl, "and to show you that I did not, I beg you to take Anna home and keep her with you to-night, I am really worn out and ill with our journey."

"No, that cannot be!" said the Professor sternly. "The time is past for these endless sacrifices. Adele, you are too willing, you understand too well how to use other people, you must now take upon yourself the charge of your child again."

"Yes, I am glad to hear it!" cried Frau Hellwig from where she stood, "for then the girl can weed these beds to-night thoroughly—I cannot well require Heinrich or Frederika to do it any longer, they are growing too old."

The Professor's face flushed. Difficult as it was usually to decipher those strange features, they now showed unmistakable shame and embarrassment. Perhaps he had never until this moment appreciated fully the position in which he had helped to place this young gifted creature. Felicitas left her seat beneath the chestnut-tree. She knew that Madame's few words were equivalent to a command, and that if she did not wish to be loaded with biting reproaches she must instantly obey. But the Professor stepped up to her.

"I believe my word as guardian is needed here," he said, with apparent calmness, "and I do not wish that you should perform labour of this description."

"Ah—would you like to enclose her in a glass case?"



asked Madame stepping her huge foot upon the grass and advancing with more speed than usual. "She has been brought up strictly in accordance with your directions,—strictly. Shall I show you your letters, where you repeated again and again until I was almost tired of seeing the words, that she was to be brought up to service, and that she must be subjected to strict discipline?"

"I have not the smallest intention of disclaiming an iota of what has been done according to my express desire," replied the Professor firmly, but gloomily, "nor can I deny that I did what I did from honest motives, and in the full conviction that I was acting for the best,—but I trust I shall never be guilty of the weakness of persisting in what I have discovered to be an error, for fear of the consequences—therefore I wish now to declare that my views are changed, and that of course I must act differently."

The Councillor's widow stooped as she heard the last words. She plucked a lonely clover-leaf which the scythe had spared, and tore it to pieces. But Madame laughed contemptuously.

"Don't make yourself ridiculous, John," she said with a cold sneer. "At your age a man does not adopt a new set of ideas. Those which he has must be decided and strong, or his life will be a failure. Besides, you are not the only one who has had to do with this matter. I have done my part, and I should think that the proof might be found in my life that, by the grace of God, I have always done what was right. I shall be sorry indeed if the Hellwig weakness is about to manifest itself in your character, for, should it do so, I might as well tell you at once, we must be strangers to each other for the future. As long as the girl lives in my house, she is subject to my commands—she shall spend not one idle minute, if I



can prevent it,—but after she leaves me she may be as useless as she chooses, for all I care,—fold her hands in her lap and play the lady.”

“That she will never do, Madame Hellwig!” said Felicitas, glancing at her hands, which were exquisitely shaped, but tanned and hard with labour. “Labour is one of the conditions of her life. Will you have the goodness to point out to me the beds which you wish weeded?”

The Professor, who had received his mother’s coarse attack with entire composure, turned hastily to Felicitas, and regarded her wrathfully:

“I expressly forbid you to do it!” he cried harshly and with decision, and a stern frown contracted his brow. “And if as your guardian my command is powerless to combat your stubborn determination, let me as a physician appeal to your reason. You have over-exerted yourself with nursing little Anna. Your whole appearance shows it. In a very short time you will leave my mother’s house,—it is our duty to take care that you at least carry a healthy physique with you into your future sphere of action.”

“That,” said Madame, “is a sensible reason, which carries weight.” To her ears, after waiting in vain to hear her son reprove Felicitas, the words ‘stubborn determination’ were actually like music. “Let her go to the house now—I don’t care”—she added,—“although I cannot see how all the nursing she has had to do should have done her any harm. She is young, and has always been well fed. Look at other girls in her position, John,—they work day and night, and yet what red cheeks they have!”

She took the young widow’s arm, and went back across the lawn, evidently expecting that her son would follow



her,—and the young widow, in a pouting, cross mood, evidently avoided looking back for him. At first he seemed to be about to accompany them—but he turned back after a few steps, and as the last glimpse of the unfortunate blue dress disappeared behind the cypress hedge, he slowly approached the chestnut-tree, and stood for a few seconds silently beside Felicitas, who was tying the string of her straw hat beneath her chin. Suddenly he stooped and looked under the broad brim of the hat, which entirely shaded the girl's forehead and eyes. The irritation that was still visible in his face melted away as he looked at her.

“You do not know that you have pained me to-day more than I can tell you?” he asked, shaking his head, and as gently as though he were speaking to a child.

She was silent.

“Felicitas, I cannot for one instant believe that you are one of those women who delight in hearing a man sue humbly and repeatedly for forgiveness.”

She arose. The pure maidenly face flushed painfully.

“Such entreaties, it seems to me, are always most painful to those to whom they are addressed,” she answered, after a pause, in a gentler tone than she was accustomed to use to him. “I would not willingly listen to them from any one who was not my companion—my friend. Children should ask forgiveness of a parent. I should not like to see the case reversed. Nor should I——” she paused, but the blush still coloured her cheeks.

“Nor would it be any gratification to you to see a man continually humble himself before you, Felicitas. Am I not right?” he concluded her unfinished sentence quickly, and something like hope sounded in his voice. “But to carry out such lofty views as yours would bring about evil results,” he continued, after a moment's silence.



“And now be truly kind, and consider whether it be not a woman’s duty to extend her hand in aid to a man, and assist him to extricate himself from the error which he acknowledges! Stop, I do not want an answer now,—I see in your eyes it would not be the one that I wish to hear. I will wait patiently,—perhaps the time may come when the angry fir-tree upon the rock will not use its weapons.”

He left her. Upon the ground at her feet lay the four-leaved clover which had fallen from his hands, and which had been plucked as a symbol of good fortune. It lay upon the closely-cut lawn with all its four leaves delicately spread out. She would not pick it up—she had nothing to do with his good or evil fortune—but she made a wide circuit around it,—she would not absolutely trample the little green prophet under foot.

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## CHAPTER XX.

AFTER a series of lovely days full of sunshine and spring breezes, a leaden stormy sky hung above the little town of X——. The dull clouds seemed almost to touch the top of the lofty tower, whose round white shaft shot up into the air, surmounted by a brilliant green point, like a stalk of asparagus. On such days, under such a dark sky, the old merchant-house in the Square seemed to partake once more of the gloomy grand character of its ancestral times, when grim portraits of robber knights adorned its walls—and a breath from the middle ages seemed to sweep through its lofty rooms.

To-day the curtains were closed before the windows of



the rooms in the front of the house inhabited by the Councillor's widow. Their lovely tenant was suffering with headache, and was in such a state of uncontrollable excitement, that her rooms were darkened and every sound near them hushed. The stern face which was seen behind the asclepias plant from year's end to year's end, did not appear to-day. The gray skies above seemed to bode evil—and, indeed, this day was to be one of the grayest and gloomiest in Madame's experience,—it was the day of the reading of the old Mam'selle's will. Her two sons only, with old Heinrich, had been summoned to appear by the lawyer,—it would seem that Madame's existence had been entirely ignored in the matter,—but Nathanael was absent and his mother appeared in his stead.

Towards noon she returned to the house in the Square, accompanied by the Professor, while Heinrich followed at a respectful distance. Sudden deaths and dangerous illnesses among her friends and connections had been powerless to affect any change in Madame's appearance in public,—her strong will, which would not bend, her evident piety preserved her marble features in their tearless repose, even in the presence of such visitations of Providence. How often had she seemed to some writhing, despairing soul, robbed of its dearest treasures, a revelation of saintly resignation! But to-day there was presented to the little town of X—— an unwonted spectacle. This model of invincible composure had undergone a change. Her features were undeniably flushed with agitation—the deep solemnity of her usual gait was perceptibly altered, and she moved with unseemly haste, while the words which she addressed to her son walking silently at her side, though whispered, were evidently none of the gentlest.

Notwithstanding her headache, the young widow had



been peeping from between the curtains of her room, upon the watch for their return, and as soon as they entered the house she came down stairs—with pale cheeks and heavy eyes, 'tis true, but most charmingly dressed—to hear the results of the morning. They all entered the sitting-room together.

“Well, congratulate us, Adele,” cried Madame, with a bitter laugh, full of malice and contempt. “She has left property worth forty-two thousand thalers, and not one cent to the Hellwig family, to whom the money all belongs by right! The will is the craziest piece of work that can be imagined; but it cannot be touched—we must not say one word to prevent such injustice—and all because the men of the family have had not one particle of energy,—matters would have been different if *I* had been the head of the house! I cannot understand how my deceased husband—without having the smallest security—could leave that old woman up there under the roof to do just as she pleased.”

The Professor was walking up and down the room with his hands clasped behind him. His brow was clouded, and from beneath the thick eyebrows he shot lightning glances of displeasure, as his mother was speaking. At last he stood still before her.

“Who insisted that our old aunt should be banished to those rooms under the roof?” he asked, gravely and pointedly. “Who strengthened the former head of the house, my father, in his prejudice against her, and so strictly forbade us children ever to approach or have any intercourse with our old relative? You did this, mother. If you wished to inherit her property, you should have pursued a different course!”

“How! do you think I could ever have been upon terms of intimacy with her? I—who have walked in the fear of



the Lord my whole life long—have anything to do with that guilty woman, who desecrated the Sabbath and had no religion! She knows now that the Lord has turned his face away from her forever. No power upon earth should have compelled me to hold any intercourse with her. But she should have been declared of unsound mind, and placed in confinement—there were fifty ways in which your father could have done so!”

The Professor's face grew white—he looked at his mother in absolute terror, took his hat and left the room, without another word. He had had a glimpse of a frightful abyss. And this stubborn religion of the letter—this pietistic arrogance, beneath which such boundless spiritual pride had been at work—had surrounded his mother, in his eyes, like a halo of light. This was the character which had so long seemed to him the model of feminine perfection! He confessed to himself that he had once held the same views which were entertained by his mother and the relative who had been the guide of his youth—yes, he had even gone beyond them in intolerance and devotion to forms—he had been unwearied in the work of proselytism, seeking to compel all to walk in the path which he himself was treading, and which he had believed to be the only one leading to salvation. And that poor innocent orphan girl, with her brain full of bright hopeful visions, and her proud honest heart—he had seized her with an iron grasp, and had thrust her into that cold dark region. How she must have suffered—that nightingale among ravens! He covered his eyes with his hand as if he were giddy, slowly ascended the stairs, and shut himself up in his lonely study.

While the above was taking place in the sitting-room, a like scene of excitement and irritation was going on in



the servants' room. The old cook was flying about with her cap-strings streaming and fluttering, but Heinrich withstood the storm of feminine passion, like a rock in the midst of the ocean. He had on his Sunday coat, and his features expressed a strange mixture of joy, sorrow, and a sense of the ludicrous.

"Don't think I'm envious, Heinrich—that would be unchristian!" cried Frederika: "I don't grudge it to you!—Two thousand thalers!" She clasped her hands, wrung them, and let them fall again. "You have much more luck than wit, Heinrich! Ah! good Heaven—here have I been working all my life long, going to church all winter on the very coldest days, and praying God to send me some good fortune—and I've never had any luck, while you've got all this! Two thousand thalers! it's a perfect mine, Heinrich! But I can't help thinking of one thing—can you take the money with a clear conscience? The old Mam'selle ought not to have willed away a penny of her money—it all belonged by good rights to our people,—and when you come to think of it, it would be actual stealing to take it, Heinrich. I don't know exactly what I should do in your place, but——"

"I'll take it—I'll take it, Frederika," said Heinrich, with great composure.

The cook ran into her kitchen and slammed the door behind her.

The old Mam'selle's will, that had elicited so much emotion in the Hellwig house, had been deposited with her lawyer ten years before. It had been written by the testator herself, and after the usual formal introduction read in effect as follows:

'1. In the year 1633, *Lutz von Hirschsprung*, a son of *Adrian v. Hirschsprung*, who was murdered by Swedish soldiers, quitted the town of X—— to settle elsewhere



To the direct descendants of this branch of the old noble Thuringian stock, I bequeath—

‘a. Thirty thousand thalers.

‘b. The golden bracelet, upon which are engraved certain verses in old German, surrounded by a wreath of flowers.

‘c. Bach’s manuscript copy of his opera. It will be found among my autographic collection of famous composers, in portfolio No. 1, and is inscribed with the name—*Gotthelf von Hirschsprung*.

‘I herewith direct my lawyers to make an appeal, repeating the same if necessary, through the public journals, to any existing descendants of the afore-mentioned branch of the Hirschsprung family. Should such appeals be without result, and no claimant appear, it is my wish and will at the end of a year that the above-mentioned capital of 30,000 thalers, together with the proceeds of the bracelet when sold, and of the Bach manuscript also to be sold, be handed over to the worthy mayor of the town of X——, to be by him appropriated as a fund to the following purpose:

‘2. The yearly interest of the capital safely invested, shall be divided in all future time equally among eight of the teachers employed in the public schools of X——, in such a manner that all the public school teachers shall receive a portion in regular rotation without favour or partiality. Directors and professors have no claim.

‘I dispose of my property thus in the firm conviction that it will be of as much use as if I should call into existence with it a new institution. The office of public school teacher is as yet only the stepchild of the State,—the men whose exertions are so useful in building up what must be our national bulwark, are still exposed to



pressing pecuniary anxieties, while they enrich thousands by their mental labour. May the eyes of others be opened to this dark shadow in the advancing light of our times, and may others aid in exalting and supporting a calling—at present so often under-rated!

‘3. Whatever I possess in silver plate and jewellery, with the exception of the afore-named bracelet, reverts to the existing head of the Hellwig family, as old heirlooms which must not fall into the hands of strangers, as well as everything which I possess in the way of furniture and linen.

‘4. My manuscript autographic collection of celebrated composers, with the exception of the afore-mentioned Bach manuscript, will be sold by my lawyers. The proceeds of the sale I devise to my two grand-nephews, John and Nathanael Hellwig, in token of the sorrow I have always felt in not being allowed to send them gifts at Christmas.’

Various legacies to poor mechanics and others followed, to the amount of 12,000 thalers, among which was the legacy to Heinrich of 2000, and one to her maid of 1000 thalers.

Heinrich related to Felicitas as correctly as he could the contents of the will. There was no mention made of the place where the old Mam’selle kept her silver—that, at least, she gathered from his account, and was rejoiced indeed. Now, if the secret repository were not discovered by accident, it would be in her power to destroy the little gray box before any other mortal eyes should rest upon it.

“I shall always lament it, Fay!” said Heinrich sadly, as they sat alone together in the servants’ room. “Now you have nothing in the world! If the old Mam’selle had only lived twenty-four hours longer, she would have



made another will, and you would have had heaps of money,—she loved you dearly.”

Felicitas smiled. The self-confidence of youth, which never dreams of sordid cares for daily bread, or of providing for a helpless old age, beamed in that smile.

“It is better as it is, Heinrich,” she replied. “Those poor people whom Aunt Cordula has taken care of, want the money more than I do,—and depend upon it, she had reasons for the disposition that she has made of the bulk of her property, which would have held good with any other will that she might have made.”

“Yes, yes,—there’s some strange connection with the Hirschsprungs!” said Heinrich thoughtfully. “I remember old Hirschsprung very well,—he was a shoemaker—he made my first pair of boots. I shall never forget them. He lived in the little street there at the side of the house. And so it came about that his boy and our old Mam’selle played together sometimes when they were children. The boy became a student afterwards, and people said was a ’lover of our old Mam’selle’s. And they say, too, that this love affair—and this is what provokes me—hurried old Herr Hellwig, her father, into his grave. He could not endure the thoughts of it,—and they say that once he got so angry with her about it, and she provoked him so, that he fell dead upon the spot,—if it’s true, I don’t believe it. A little while afterwards the old Mam’selle went to Leipzig,—the student had a nervous fever, and she stayed there and nursed him until he died. All her relatives were raging about it,—they declared that her character was gone, and they cast her off. The people here followed their example, and no one went near her when she came back at last. However all that may be, it seems to me very odd that those people should be her



heirs who went off so long ago,—they had gone long before the student was born. I can't understand it."

The following day the seals were removed from the rooms under the roof.

Dreary days followed. The uniform gray tints of the skies were unbroken by any ray of sunlight. Day and night the rain dropped upon the roofs and pavements, and the dragons' heads on the old house poured down torrents of water in the Square below,—they looked angrier than ever, those distorted wide-mouthed faces,—and the discoloured flood that splashed upon the pavement below might have been poisonous gall; for had they not been looking in all these years upon the swelling treasures which poured into the chambers and coffers of the old house, while but a thin stream had ever flowed back again into the world? And now,—'twas un-heard-of,—a large sum of money was to leave this house forever, and the stout old walls and the iron figure behind the asclepias plant had no power to retain it.

Felicitas spent these rainy days for the most part in the retirement of the chamber next to the servants' room. She had been, probably by the Professor's express desire, relieved from all hard household labour,—but she sat almost buried in huge piles of linen, mending. She must not eat the bread of idleness.

Without, in the court-yard, the fountain in the corner bubbled monotonously,—the rain fell without cessation, pattering upon the broad leaves of the coltsfoot growing there; sometimes the crow of a cock was heard from the adjoining poultry-yard,—or the gray tone of colour that brooded over all was broken by two or three doves, who would light upon the dripping stones and spread their feathers to receive the rain. Light, sound, and motion all seemed muffled—dulled; and the universal gloom was



apparently shared by the pale young girl sitting at the bow-window. True, the hand with its thimble moved regularly and without intermission,—but the exquisite profile bending over the work never stirred from its position. Life, with its fearful experiences, had thus far failed in stamping any impress of suffering or submission upon those beautiful features,—they had only grown paler, as if they were stiffening into marble, wearing the same proud expression of unconquerable power of resistance.

But beneath the coarse dark dress an anxious heart was beating,—and while the hand mechanically repaired many a rent, the mind was tortured at the thought of severe tasks and of the hard struggles that must ensue. For the lawyers had also searched in vain for the old Mam'selle's silver plate and antique bracelet. At first the circumstance had acted soothingly upon the girl's disturbed and anxious mind; but Heinrich had since then been in a state of the greatest distress. Frau Hellwig had informed the commission, with ambiguous glances and unmistakable emphasis, that Heinrich and the maid had for years been the only persons possessing free admission to the old Mam'selle's apartments,—and upon this declaration, which looked very much like an accusation, the honest fellow had immediately been subjected to a most degrading examination. He was beside himself. What a trial it was for Felicitas, to see the grief of her faithful old friend without allowing one word of her secret to pass her lips! Quiet and thoughtful as he had always been, his composure seemed entirely to forsake him before such an accusation,—and she justly feared that, in the fearful pressure of his anxiety to free himself from the horrible suspicion, he might commit some indiscretion, which would be unfortunate indeed just at this



time, when so much caution was needed to preserve the old Mam'selle's secret.

It was now doubly difficult to visit the rooms under the roof. The Professor had gone through them on the day when the seals were removed, in a state of the greatest astonishment, and had immediately taken formal possession, as the head of the house, of the habitation of the mysterious old aunt. Perhaps, at sight of the original and tasteful arrangement of the rooms, his eyes had been suddenly opened to the character and pursuits of his disowned relative. He would not have a chair moved from its place, and was greatly provoked when he saw the Councillor's widow take a needle out of a pincushion.

He seemed determined to spend as much time as possible, during the remainder of his stay with his mother, in the rooms under the roof. He only came down stairs at meal-times,—and then, as Frederika declared, 'looking as cross as a bear.'

But the Councillor's widow, she, too, had been seized with a kind of passion for the 'charming quiet asylum,' and she begged her cousin to allow her, as a special favour, frequently to share it with him. Rosa swept the floor, and the young widow removed the dust from the furniture with her own fair hands. Thus Aunt Cordula's room was scarcely ever unoccupied,—and besides, the Professor had taken care that the antique lock of the painted door should be replaced by a new one, to open which Felicitas' key was of course useless; there was no way of ingress for her except over the roofs.

At the thought that she should be obliged to steal into the rooms like some midnight thief, she shook her head with disgust,—and this perpetual watching for the first moment when their unsuspecting inhabitants should leave them, was abhorrent to her. Nevertheless, she held most



firmly to her determination, and a cold shudder ran through her whenever she thought that two weeks were all the time now left in which to accomplish the task.

At last the rainy days seemed over. A piece of clear blue sky hung above the square court-yard—the coltsfoot dried its well-washed leaves in a most refreshing breeze—the swallows, whose nests were hanging thick under the eaves, constantly flew in and out, their shining little backs actually sparkling in the pure warm sunshine. It was a day to spend in the open air. Perhaps they would take the evening meal in the garden to-day, and then the path over the roofs would be free. But this hope of Felicitas' was not fulfilled. Immediately after dinner, Rosa came to the bow-window to tell her that she must take little Anna to the garden—the Professor had promised the child she should go. The other members of the family would follow later in the afternoon, and take their supper there.

And soon Felicitas was walking, with the child by her side, in the lonely garden. Instead of the slates of the roofs and the wooden floor of the gallery, she had beneath her feet the gravel of the sunny garden paths. During the rainy weather, thousands of roses had come into bloom. In the broad flower-beds were rare species of roses rearing their lovely buds with crimson-velvet leaves proudly above the humbler flowers, like the royal purple above a crowd of subjects—while in the vegetable garden the more common but exquisitely fragrant *antifolia* grew everywhere among the plants, and mingled its delicious breath with the commonplace odour of dill and sweet marjoram.

Felicitas passed by the gorgeous flowers with her head sunk upon her breast, holding little Anna by the hand, and the sympathetic little child limped along silently, in-



interrupting the reverie of her kind friend by no childish prattle. With wild burning pain, Felicitas thought of the roses of other years,—how much sweeter was their fragrance, how much more brilliant their beauty, when Aunt Cordula's dear kind eyes were still beaming, as on still Sunday afternoons she read aloud many a delightful page from her rich library to the pupil at her side, who listened eagerly to the melodious voice, while from the flowers around the sweetest fragrance floated on the air, and the fair land of Thuringia lay spread out before them! Then gradually the sweet sensation of home had risen in the girl's soul—she felt that she belonged in the peaceful, happy rooms where she was cherished and guided by motherly love—where, if only for a few hours, she was free, unfettered in her actions and thoughts, encouraged to speak of whatever arose in her mind,—no wonder the roses were fairer and sweeter, and the whole world was flooded with golden sunshine!

She raised her head and looked across the hedge into the next garden. There she saw the spotless white cap of Madame Franz. The old lady was seated at a table with her son, taking her coffee. She was leaning comfortably back in a fauteuil and knitting, while he read aloud to her. The scene was peaceful and homelike. Felicitas said to herself that, among such kindly cultivated people, she should be once more to a certain degree free, that it was impossible that with them she could ever be degraded to a hard-working automaton, whose hands never rested, but whose eyes and lips must never betray the existence of an active, self-reliant mind.

And yet in spite of these thoughts her melancholy mood remained unaltered. Even before Aunt Cordula's death, there had been a secret corner of her soul which was entirely unintelligible to her—a dull pain that van-



ished like a phantom, if she attempted to analyze it. All she knew with any distinctness about it was that it had grown out of the presence of him who once was her chief oppressor. She had, it is true, before his arrival, been convinced that the sight of him would intensify her dislike and bitterness,—but she had not dreamed that these sensations would so react upon her as to produce this mysterious state of mind which made her a riddle to herself.

Now and then, the reader's voice in the next garden would make itself heard. It was indeed a clear, full-toned voice—but there was in it none of that delicate modulation, that melodious intonation, which years had so wonderfully developed in the former monotonous voice of the Professor. Felicitas threw back her head. Why should she make the comparison? She forced her thoughts into another channel, and occupied herself with considerations fraught with intense interest to her, and upon which she had pondered much since the reading of Aunt Cordula's will. The young lawyer, Franz, had been constituted, by the legal authorities of the town, curator to the Hirschsprung heirs, if any such heirs yet existed. The summons to them had been made for two days through the public papers. Felicitas was awaiting the result with feverish impatience—it might bring her bitter pain. If any Hirschsprungs from K—— should appear in answer to this call, which held out hopes of a rich inheritance, her supposition that the wife of the juggler had been disowned by her family would be confirmed. But what kind of people could they be whose affection for one of their nearest relatives had so died out that even the tragical death of the juggler's wife could not revive it! Felicitas, therefore, had not based a single hope upon the possible appearance of her near relatives



—for them she could never have an existence; but her heart notwithstanding throbbed wildly at the thought of a possible meeting between the cruel grandparents and their unknown silent grandchild.

Madame Franz had observed Felicitas across the hedge. She arose and came forward, supported by her son. Both greeted her cordially, and the young lawyer expressed his pleasure in the prospect of future intercourse with her as a member of his mother's household. And then they passed to other topics of conversation. Something like embarrassment took possession of the travelled man of the world, as he talked with this young girl who had led so secluded an existence,—and yet who looked so fearlessly and seriously into his eyes while she gave utterance to the most original opinions. They conversed long and earnestly, touching upon a wide variety of topics. At last Madame Franz asked after the health of the child, and Felicitas took little Anna in her arms and pointed with delight to the delicate colour—the tinge of health that was just appearing upon the pale cheeks.

As they parted, the old lady held out her hand to Felicitas,—her son too stretched his right hand over the hedge, and Felicitas frankly laid her own in it. Just at that moment the gate creaked upon its hinges, and the Professor entered the garden. He stood still for a few seconds, as if rooted to the spot, then slowly lifted his hat and bowed gravely. The young lawyer opened his lips to address him, but he turned abruptly away and went into the summer-house.

“Well, that really was done like a genuine absent-minded philosopher,” said young Franz, laughing, to his mother. “My good friend, the Professor, certainly has his brain filled with some unfortunate patient,—at such times he hardly recognizes his best friends.”



Mother and son went back to their coffee, and Felicitas sought protection and shade under the hedges and trees upon the lawn.

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## CHAPTER XXI.

THE tall screen of the green cypress-hedge afforded an excellent protection from the sun, from the wind, which had just begun to blow with some violence, and probably from the reproachful glances directed towards Felicitas from the summer-house. She knew the Professor's face too well not to be sure that he had been vexed and irritated, but not absent-minded. She thought too that she perfectly understood the cause of his displeasure. He exacted the most implicit obedience to his medical directions, and was, according to Rosa's account of his practice in Bonn, accustomed to have his wishes respected. He had repeatedly, and with some irritation, forbidden Felicitas to carry little Anna,—and yet when he entered the garden she had the child in her arms. Thus only could she explain the irritated surprise that his face expressed upon his entrance.

Felicitas seated herself upon a mound upon the distant dam. A lonely birch-tree was growing here—its smooth white trunk crowned by the falling branches, which made a kind of arbour around it. The wind was scarcely to be felt in this sequestered spot—only now and then the tall grass trembled as if drawing a deep breath, and the boughs overhead rustled gently. But the brook swollen by the recent rains rushed noisily by, its gurgling discoloured waters swirling boisterously about the roots of the hazel-bushes on its brink.



The child plucked with its poor little awkward fingers a quantity of buttercups, and brought them to Felicitas that she might tie up the poor things, broken off close to the flower, into a short-stemmed nosegay for 'Uncle John.' This tedious task required patience and attention,—Felicitas' eyes were busy with the bouquet in her hands, she did not see the Professor come through the gap in the cypress-hedge and advance quickly towards her across the wide lawn. Little Anna's exclamation at his approach first made her look up,—he was already standing beside her. She would have risen, but he put out his hand and gently detained her, and then without a word he seated himself beside her.

For the first time she utterly lost her self-possession in his presence. Four weeks before she would have rejected his hand with aversion and left him instantly,—now she sat there as if paralyzed, as if beneath the spell of a magician. It provoked her that he had lately adopted such a familiar, unconstrained tone in speaking to her,—she longed for nothing more ardently than to show him that she thoroughly hated and despised him as she had always done,—but suddenly courage and words both failed her to tell him so. She shyly glanced up at his face—he looked anything but provoked or angry,—the flush of displeasure was gone. Felicitas was irritated to be obliged to confess to herself that the power and determination in those irregular features impressed her against her will.

He sat for a few moments beside her without speaking. She felt, although she could not see, that he was regarding her fixedly.

"Do me the kindness, Felicitas, to take that ugly thing off of your head," he at last broke the silence, and his voice sounded calm, almost gay, as, without waiting for



the young girl's consent, he gently lifted the faded worn hat from her head, and flung it contemptuously upon the grass. Through the quivering birch-leaves a sunbeam, which had hitherto played upon the old straw hat, now rested upon the girl's chestnut hair—a tress sparkled like spun gold.

“So—now I can see the angry thoughts at work behind your brow,” he said with a slight, sad smile. “I cannot bear the idea of a battle in the dark—I want to see my foe,—and that I have a bitter one there,” he pointed to her forehead, “I know only too well.”

To what would this strange introduction lead? Perhaps he expected an answer from her, but she was persistently silent. Little Anna was, with untiring assiduity, heaping her lap with buttercups, daisies, and grass, and she tied them diligently together without the slightest attempt at grace or symmetry. Those fingers that would not be delayed in their work, had lost much of their brown colour during the several days spent in the retirement of the bow-window—they were really rosy. The Professor took her right hand, opened it, and looked gravely at the palm—there were traces there of hard labour which it would need more time to obliterate. The girl who at the express command of her stern guardian had been brought up to servitude, had undeniably done her best to fit herself for a life of labour.

Although during this examination a deep blush overspread Felicitas' cheeks,—very sensitive natures are as much affected by a close observation of the palm of the hand as of the features of the face,—she recovered at this moment all her former self-possession. She looked up, and he slowly let her hand drop—then he rubbed his forehead several times, as if seeking words for an embarrassing thought.



"You liked to go to school, did you not?" he asked suddenly. "Mental occupation gives you pleasure?"

"Yes," she replied with astonishment. The question sounded strangely—it was so very abrupt. But spite of the command of language that this man possessed, diplomatic ambiguity was foreign to his nature.

"Well," he continued, "I hope you have thought sometimes of what I said to you the other day?"

"I remember what you said."

"And have certainly arrived at the conviction that it is a woman's duty faithfully to assist a man who desires to retrieve an error?" He leant his elbow on his knee, bent forward, and looked eagerly into her face.

"Not exactly," she answered decidedly, letting her hands with the bouquet fall in her lap, and looking her interrogator full in the face. "I must first know how he wishes to retrieve the error."

"Subterfuges!" he murmured,—and his face darkened perceptibly. He seemed to forget that he had hitherto spoken in generalities, and he continued with irritation. "You need not be so frightfully upon your guard. I can assure you that no one who could see your face at this moment would dream of requiring anything superhuman of you. The question simply is that you should—whatever your future plan of existence may be—remain under my guardianship a year longer, and devote this time to your mental improvement. Let me speak," he said with a frown, raising his voice as he saw she was about to interrupt him, "forget that it is I who propose this plan to you, and only remember that, in caring for your mental culture, I do just what my father would most certainly have done if he had lived."

"All this comes much too late."

"Too late? At your age?"



"You misunderstand me. I wish to say that as a helpless, irresponsible child, I was forced to accept of charity,—this I have been obliged hitherto to submit to. But now I stand upon my own feet, and I refuse to accept a penny which I do not earn."

The Professor bit his lips, and contracted his brows so that his eyes almost disappeared.

"I anticipated this reply," he said coldly,—“for I am thoroughly aware of your unconquerable pride. My plan is this,—I will lend you the means for the necessary instruction, and later, when you are independent, you shall pay me back, if you choose, every penny of the money. I know of a most excellent school in Bonn, and am family physician to the cultivated instructress who has charge of it. You would be well taught there, and,” he added, with a slight tremor in his voice, “a separation never to meet again would be postponed for at least a little while. In fourteen days my holidays will come to an end. I shall go back with my cousin to Bonn,—it will be the most natural thing in the world for you to accompany us thither. Felicitas, I entreated you the other day to be good and kind,—let me repeat the entreaty. Do not listen to the whispers of wounded feeling. I pray you to forget, if only for a few moments, the past,—and let me redeem, as far as I may, my error.”

She had listened uneasily. As before, while relating his so-called vision, there was a certain fascination in the tones of his voice. He was not as evidently excited as before,—but the sincere, honest repentance which he so frankly and seriously expressed without in the least compromising his manly dignity, touched her in spite of herself.

“If I still possessed the right of deciding what my life for the next year should be,” she said more gently than



she had ever spoken to him, "I would unconditionally and willingly accept your offer,—but I am not free to do so. The day upon which I leave Frau Hellwig's house will open for me a new sphere of action."

"Unalterably?"

"Yes,—my word once given is sacred to me. I never change or tamper with it, although to keep it cause me the greatest inconvenience."

He arose and stepped beyond the shelter of the birch-tree.

"And may I now be permitted to ask what you intend to do?"

"Oh yes," she replied with entire composure. "I should have told Frau Hellwig, if I had had an opportunity. Madame Franz has engaged me as her companion."

These few words acted like a thunderbolt. The Professor turned short round—his eyes flashed lightning.

"The lady over there?" he asked, pointing toward the next garden, as though he could hardly trust his ears. "Dismiss any such project entirely from your mind," he said with decision and an air of command. "I will never give my consent to it!"

The young girl arose with a defiant gesture—the carefully plucked flowers fell to the ground. "Your consent?" she said proudly. "I do not ask it. In fourteen days I shall be free, and can go wherever it pleases me."

"The case is altered, Felicitas," he said, controlling himself. "I have more right over you than you imagine. Years may elapse before this right expires—and even then it is a question whether I shall release you."

"We shall see about that!" she said coldly, with determined reserve.

"Yes, you shall see about it! I had a long and satis-



factory conversation yesterday with Dr. Boehm, my father's most intimate and confidential friend, concerning the circumstances of your reception in this house. I learned from it that you were committed to my father's care upon the express condition that you should remain under his protection until your own father reclaimed you, or until some other true protector shall present himself who will——give you his name. My father appointed me in his stead in case of his death, and I am firmly resolved to abide by these conditions."

And now Felicitas entirely lost all composure.

"God in heaven!" she cried, beside herself, clasping her hands. "Is my misery, then, never to end? Must I be forced to live forever in this horrible state of dependence? For years I have been sustained by the thought that my eighteenth birthday would bring me deliverance. This thought alone has enabled me to preserve my outward composure, while I suffered inconceivably! No, no,—I am no longer the patient creature who will allow herself to be trodden under foot out of respect for the wishes of the dead. I will not!—I will have nothing more to do with these Hellwigs. At any cost I will rid myself of these hateful fetters!"

The Professor seized both her hands in his as she spoke these last words; his face grew deadly pale.

"Oh, think what you are saying, Felicitas!" he said, and his voice was tender, but almost stifled with emotion. "Do not rebel so, like a helpless bird that beats its wings against the bars of its cage in a useless struggle with the inevitable. Hateful fetters! Have you, then, no conception of the bitter, bitter pain that your hard angry words cause me? You shall be free—free to think and act as you please,—only guarded, protected like a—fondly-loved child! Felicitas, you shall learn what it is to be cherished



and surrounded by love. This is the last time I shall ever use my authority as your guardian. I pray you do not make me wretched by your resistance, for I declare to you now it will be of no avail. I shall take matters into my own hands, and will myself break any engagement you may have entered into with Madame Franz."

"Do so," cried Felicitas almost hoarsely, with quivering lips, and a face from which every drop of blood had departed. "But I too can act, and be sure I will defend myself against you as long as I live."

Never before in her tempest-tossed existence had she braved so fearful a storm as the one now raging in her soul. Suddenly new voices arose there, appealing loudly in the midst of the uproar, and they sounded like the echo of his earnest words of entreaty. A fearful peril overshadowed her like a dark thunder-cloud, she felt instinctively that she must separate herself from him at any sacrifice, if she did not wish to succumb irrevocably to the danger that encompassed her. Already he seemed to possess an indefinable power over her whole being; every harsh word that she spoke to him struck painfully back upon her own heart.

He had until now held her hands firmly in the clasp of his own, and gazed, as if he would read her very soul, into her face which involuntarily mirrored for a moment the fierce conflict raging within. The keen eyes of the physician, who had made mankind his study, had probed many a human breast, although he had never before tried to read a young girl's heart that, however pride might seek to defend it, was yet unguarded from the very fact of its innocence. "You will not succeed!" he said suddenly, with regained composure. "My eyes are watchful and my arm is powerful. You will not escape me, Felicitas. I will under no circumstances leave you here in X—,



and it is equally certain that I will not go back to Bonn without you."

The garden-gate had creaked upon its hinges some time before, but the noise had been unheard. Rosa now approached and informed the Professor that Frau Hellwig awaited him in the summer-house, and that the Councilor's widow begged him to come immediately.

"Is she ill?" asked the Professor, without looking at the maid.

"No," she answered in some surprise, "but my mistress says that the coffee, which she is making herself, will soon be ready,—she wishes the Herr Professor to enjoy it while it is hot,—the young lawyer, Herr Franz, is also in the summer-house."

"Very well, I am coming," said the Professor; but he made no motion to go. Perhaps he hoped that Rosa would return to her mistress,—if so, he was mistaken. The girl busied herself with little Anna, who was making a sorrowful lament over 'the pretty flowers all trampled dead' upon the grass. At last, evidently disappointed, he walked down the slope of the dam.

"Do not stay there any longer," he called to Felicitas. "The wind is rising every moment. I think we shall have a storm. Come with Anna into the summer-house."

He disappeared behind the cypress-hedge, but Felicitas walked hurriedly along the whole length of the dam. All was chaos in her mind, usually so clear and decided. In vain she strove to recover her accustomed composure, to analyze her sensations and regain her mastery over herself. She must then continue to bow beneath the yoke, and not only be denied all chance of independence for an indefinite period of time, but she must live in unavoidable proximity to him,—in daily intercourse with him for years,—as if this were not the most fearful punishment



that she could undergo. Had she not done everything to prove to him how her very soul abhorred him, how implacable she should always be while she lived? And was it not, therefore, the very refinement of cruelty to fetter her in this way? Why, she would rather a thousand times be subjected for years to Madame's most cruel treatment, than pass one month more in the society of the man who was developing this demoniac power over her. His voice already sufficed to bewilder her thoughts,—the indescribably gentle and tender tone that he had lately adopted, thrilled every fibre of her heart and made it beat wildly,—that must be because of the old hate that stirred so at his approach. But would not this intensity of feeling, brought so continually into play, destroy her physically and morally? The fable of the fir-tree had constantly occupied her mind, and now its only possible explanation was made clear by his recent declaration: "Felicitas, you shall now learn what it is to be cherished and cared for by love."

He intended then, in spite of her repeated and determined declarations that she would decide for herself in all questions regarding her future, to dispose according to his pleasure of her hand—she must marry as he should direct,—she would thus be provided for, and his error, which he now fully admitted, atoned for. At these thoughts she grew absolutely faint and giddy. How hard, how wrong, such designs were! Could he compel any one to love her? He himself had acknowledged that he cherished an unfortunate passion, that he must pass a lonely existence, thus yielding to his heart the right to influence his whole future life. He should see that she claimed exactly the same right—she would not be treated like merchandise.

What prevented her from instantly going to Madame



Franz and claiming her protection?—Ah, there was the little gray box—it bound her more firmly to this wretched house than any human will could have done—for its sake she would endure until the last moment.

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## CHAPTER XXII.

LITTLE ANNA interrupted the young girl's anxious and troubled meditations. The child took her hand coaxingly and tried to lead her away from the dam. The wind was already blowing with great force through the tops of the trees,—keen blasts penetrated even the more sheltered portions of the garden,—the terrified little flowers in the grass bent before their persecutor. Flying clouds now and then obscured the setting sun, throwing shadows as of huge birds of prey across the paths and lawn,—rose-leaves whirled about in the air, and even the stiff cypress hedges bent like so many stately solemn court-dames.

It was more comfortable within doors. Felicitas brought a garden-chair into the hall of the summer-house, seated herself, and took out her sewing. The doors of the little kitchen and the cosy summer-room were wide open. It was not easy to imagine anything more charming than the Councillor's widow when she undertook the rôle of a notable hostess. She had on a richly trimmed coquettish black silk apron, a dark crimson rose peeped out from among her fair curls just above her left ear,—she had evidently plucked it from its stem as she passed the parent-bush and placed it where it now was, unconsciously, while lost in thought,—the effect was charming. Her



skirt was festooned above her petticoat that it might not impede her hospitable labours, and the little feet beneath it in their well-fitting boots moved with childlike grace, according well with the expression of the rosy face, which was that of a happy harmless child zealously performing some important duty entrusted to it—who would have suspected the widow and mother in this impersonation of innocent naïveté?

While she was busily preparing the coffee in the kitchen, a lively conversation was going on in the next room between Frau Hellwig and the young lawyer—the subject was the old Mam'selle's will. Heinrich and Frederika had already declared to Felicitas that Madame no longer spoke or thought of anything that had not something to do with this unlucky story of the will. She saw Madame's face for one moment through the open door—she thought it perceptibly altered, and there was an unwonted degree of haste in her manner of speaking. Chagrin and anger had evidently retained the upper hand in this woman's mind.

The Professor took no share in the conversation,—it even seemed as though he heard nothing of what was going on. Lost in thought, with his hands behind him, he paced steadily to and fro in the room, only raising his eyes as he passed the open door, to regard the girl sewing in the little hall without.

“I shall never be reconciled to it as long as I live, my dear Franz,” repeated Frau Hellwig. “It would be different if every farthing had not been hardly earned by the Hellwigs. And then to have some worthless person appear who will squander in a few months the careful savings, which would have been such a source of blessing in our hands.”

“Oh, aunt,” said the young widow, who had just then



entered the room with her coffee-pot and was filling the cups,—“I am afraid you are exciting yourself again about that miserable will—indeed it is not good for you, you will be ill. Think of your children—think of me, dear aunt, and try to forget it!”

“Forget it!” cried Frau Hellwig. “Never! How can any one forget who possesses a particle of character, which indeed our young people now-a-days are strangely wanting in,”—here she cast a withering glance at her son, who was still pacing the apartment. “I feel too deeply the disgrace of submitting to such gross injustice—I cannot away with it. How can you ask such a thing, or require such tame forgetfulness of me! You are sometimes dreadfully superficial, Adele!”

The face of the Councillor's widow flushed, a hard, obstinate line appeared around her mouth, and the cup which she was handing to Madame trembled in her hand, but she possessed sufficient self-control to suppress the sharp reply that rose to her lips.

“Indeed I do not deserve your reproach,” she said very gently, after a few moments of silence. “No one can take this miserable affair more to heart than I. It is not only that I lament the pecuniary loss, dear aunt, which you and my two cousins must sustain,—my woman's nature recoils from the idea of such moral turpitude. Here has this cunning old woman spent half her life under your roof devising all the while means of injuring most deeply her nearest relatives. She has left the world unreconciled to God or man, and with a catalogue of sins upon her soul which must eternally shut her out from the joys of heaven—how terrible! Dear John, shall I pour you out a cup of coffee?”

“No, I thank you,” replied the Professor, and went on pacing the room as before.



The work fell from Felicitas' hands. She listened breathless to every word uttered by that traducing tongue. True, Heinrich had told her that the world had judged the old Mam'selle most hastily and unjustly,—but this was the first time that any condemnation of her had reached her ears. Her temples throbbed—every word went to her heart like the stab of a knife,—the pain which she now endured for the dead was greater than the pang of separation.

“I do not know whether the old lady was really guilty or not,” said the young lawyer. “From all that I hear, nothing has ever been clearly proved against her. The scandalous chronicle of our good town has been content with spreading only vague surmises. Her will, however, proves that she must undoubtedly have been a most original person, of extraordinary power of mind.”

Madame laughed contemptuously, and scornfully turned her back upon the bold defender of the dead.

“My most excellent friend, it is the duty of your profession to whitewash the darkest crimes, and to discover angelic innocence where the whole world has justly condemned,—when I consider this, I can understand what you have just said,” declared the Councillor's widow with evident malice. “But there is an opinion which I value in this case—I pray you to forgive me—very much more highly than yours: papa used to know her. She was a person of such stubborn obstinacy that she literally worried her father to death. She certainly showed by her visit to Leipzig how little regard she entertained for her own reputation,—and her ‘extraordinary power of mind,’ as you call it, led her into most devious and crooked paths,—she was a free-thinker—an atheist.”

At this moment Felicitas rose hastily and appeared upon the threshold of the door,—she stood there for one moment



with her right hand commandingly extended, her pale cheeks suffused with a burning glow—beautiful in her wrath as an avenging angel. The rosy lips which had just made such frightful accusations with such easy, self-satisfied confidence, were struck dumb at this apparition.

“She never was an atheist!” said Felicitas sternly, and her flaming glance rested full upon the countenance of the slanderer. “But she was indeed a free-thinker. She pondered earnestly, without one fear for the salvation of her soul or one thought wasted upon mere dogmas, upon the works of God,—for she knew that every path through them leads to Him. The conflict between the Bible and Natural Science never troubled her or led her astray. Her faith was rooted not in the letter, but in God’s fair creation—in her own consciousness, in the heavenly gift of reason, and in the self-reliant thought and action of the immortal soul. She did not, it is true, go with the multitude to worship God in a church,—but when the bells rang, she stood in humble adoration before the Highest,—and I cannot think that her prayers were less acceptable to Him than the worship of those who honour him with their lips while their hearts are full of evil thoughts of their fellow-men!”

Involuntarily young Franz arose,—he leaned his hand upon the back of his chair, and regarded the courageous girl with incredulous wonder.

“You knew this mysterious lady?” he asked breathlessly, as Felicitas ceased.

“I enjoyed the privilege of daily intercourse with her.”

“This is a most delightful piece of news!” said the Councillor’s widow. The observation was meant to be ironical, but the voice was uncertain, and the colour forsook the beautiful face for an instant. “You can then, without doubt, relate many a charming and piquant anecdote.”



dote from the early experience of your revered friend?" she asked in a tone which she studied to make indifferent, as she carelessly played with her coffee-spoon.

"She never alluded to her past life," replied Felicitas. She knew that she had evoked a terrible storm—she must now await it coolly with perfect self-possession.

"What a pity!" lamented the young widow ironically, shaking her curls,—the roses had already returned to her cheeks. "But how I admire your rare histrionic talent, Caroline! How wonderfully you have contrived to carry on this secret intercourse! Dear John, do you still continue to repent your previous false conception of this character?"

The Professor had stood perfectly still from the moment when the young girl appeared upon the threshold. Her justification of Aunt Cordula had found ready utterance in clear scourging words. Her keen decided intellect never lacked power of expression. The last biting question of the Councillor's widow remained unanswered. The Professor looked steadily at her, and an almost imperceptible smile hovered upon his lips, as, in spite of all her self-control, he saw her wince under that sting.

"Was that your well-guarded secret?" he now asked her.

"Yes," answered the girl—and her earnest eyes gleamed, for, strangely enough, at the sound of that voice, the conviction suddenly took possession of her that she was not alone in the coming unavoidable struggle.

"You were going to live with Aunt Cordula, and that was the happiness to which you were looking forward?" he asked further.

"Yes."

If the Councillor's widow had not been so much absorbed in the contemplation of the 'unmasked hypocrite'



standing there upon the threshold, she would certainly have been shocked by the joy that now sparkled in the Professor's eyes and transfigured his grave face most strangely.

Question and answer had hitherto succeeded each other with such lightning rapidity, that Frau Hellwig had had no time to recover from her astonishment. She leaned back in her chair as though stiffened into stone, and the stocking that she was knitting fell from her hands, and the white ball of yarn rolled into the middle of the room.

"This is an extremely interesting and important discovery for me!" cried the young lawyer as he hastily approached Felicitas. "Do not be afraid that I shall attempt to pry into the private affairs of the deceased lady,—far be it from me to dream of such a thing. But perhaps you may be able to give me satisfaction in regard to certain unaccountable allusions and directions in her will that——"

Oh, Heavens! she was then to be examined concerning the missing silver! A shudder ran through her whole frame—her face grew whiter than snow,—in great confusion she cast down her eyes—she was the very image of convicted guilt.

"As a passionate lover of music and a devoted collector of autographs, I have been in a state of delighted expectation since the reading of the will," continued the lawyer, after a momentary pause occasioned by his surprise at the girl's sudden change of countenance. "The will alludes expressly to a manuscript collection of the works of famous composers. We have searched for such a collection in vain. It is maintained by many that the deceased suffered from aberration of mind, and that this part of her possessions was a chimera, a phantom of her



brain. Have you ever seen such a collection in the old lady's possession?"

"Yes," said Felicitas, drawing a breath of relief, but outraged by the suspicion hinted at by the young lawyer, "I knew every sheet of it!"

"Was it large and valuable?"

"It comprised works by all the famous musicians of the past century."

"There is also mention made several times in the will—but here I believe there is really an error existing—of an opera by Bach. Can you remember the title of any such work?" the lawyer further inquired, with an air of intense interest.

"Oh yes," replied the young girl quickly. "There has been no error committed here either. It was an operetta. Johann Sebastian Bach composed it for the town of X——, and it was brought out in the old town-hall. It was entitled 'The Wisdom of the Magistracy in the Establishment of Breweries.'"

"Impossible!" cried the young man, actually starting back in the excess of his astonishment. "This composition, then, which has been a kind of myth for the musical world, did really exist!"

"It was a partitur written by Bach's own hand," Felicitas continued. "It was presented to a certain Gotthelf von Hirschsprung, and was afterwards left as a legacy to the deceased."

"These are priceless revelations! And now I conjure you to tell me where this collection is to be found."

A gulf suddenly yawned at her feet. In her great indignation at the thought that any one could doubt the soundness and power of Aunt Cordula's mind, she had told all that she could to refute so horrible a slander. In her zeal to defend her dear old friend, she had not re-



flected whither her revelations were of necessity leading her. Now she must answer this question directly. Should she tell what was untrue? No, that was impossible!

"As far as I know, it no longer exists," she said in a much lower voice than before.

"It no longer exists! You mean doubtless that it exists no longer as a collection."

Felicitas was silent—she wished herself miles away from her importunate interrogator.

"Or can it be possible," he continued in a tone of alarm, "that it is really destroyed? Should this be the case, you must tell me how such an accident occurred."

Here was a dilemma indeed! There sat the woman whom her statement must compromise. How often in passionate moments had an evil desire for revenge upon her heartless tormentor possessed her! She had thought then that it would be sweet to see this odious woman suffer. And now the moment had come when this desire could be gratified,—she could humiliate the great lady—convict her of an act not to be justified. How little had she understood the nobility of her own nature! She was entirely incapable of revenge. She cast a stolen glance at her foe, and was met by a look positively ferocious. It was powerless to affect her.

"I was not present when the collection was destroyed, and can therefore give you no account of its destruction," she said, so firmly, so conclusively, as to render all further interrogatories obviously useless. But her forbearance cost her dear, for now the storm which had been darkly muttering above her head broke loose. Frau Hellwig arose, leaned both hands upon the table before her, and a gleam of truly demoniac rage illumined her colourless countenance.



“Wretched creature, do you think to spare me?” she cried in a voice trembling with passion. “Do you presume to suspect that I desire to conceal anything I have done from the world, and that you can assist me in such concealment—you!” She turned away contemptuously, and addressed the young lawyer with all her previous coolness and self-confidence. “It is true, I am used to render an account of my actions to my God alone,” she said. “Whatever I do is done in his name, in his honour, and for the glorification of his holy church. Nevertheless, I will tell you, my dear Franz, what has become of your ‘priceless collection,’ chiefly with the view of convincing this person of her madness in supposing that I could possibly act in concert with her. The deceased Cordula Hellwig was an infidel, a lost soul,—and whoever undertakes her justification will share her condemnation. Instead of praying for her vanished peace of mind, she silenced the voice of conscience with the poison of profane music full of incitement to worldly pleasure. Even on the Sabbath she desecrated my quiet house with her sinful practices. She would sit for days before those profane books, and the more she was absorbed in them, the more obstinately did she reject and resist my efforts for the salvation of her soul. Since then I have had no more earnest desire than to blot out of existence, to destroy from the face of the earth, these miserable human devices in which the Lord has no part, and which are such a stumbling-block in the way of salvation. I burned the papers, my dear Franz!”

She said these last words with a raised voice and an expression of the greatest exultation.

“Mother!” cried the Professor, hastily approaching her.

“Well, my son?” she asked, motioning him back. She



raised herself to her full height, and stood there as if clothed in brazen armour. "You will probably reproach me with having deprived Nathanael and yourself of this valuable inheritance," she continued. "Rest content—I am resolved to replace the few paltry dollars from my own purse. You shall be no losers by my act."

"The few paltry dollars!" repeated the lawyer—he actually trembled with surprise and indignation. "Madame Hellwig, you will have the pleasure of refunding to your sons five thousand thalers!"

"Five thousand thalers?" Frau Hellwig laughed aloud. "That would be a rare jest! Those miserable yellow sheets! Don't make yourself ridiculous, my dear Franz!"

"Those miserable yellow sheets will cost you dear enough, you will find," retorted the young man, trying to control himself. "I will show you to-morrow a notice written by the deceased lady herself, in which she estimates the value of the collection at five thousand thalers, at the lowest—and this not including the Bach manuscript. As for that,—pray understand what I say, Madame Hellwig,—you can have no idea to what legal penalties you have made yourself liable by the destruction of that priceless treasure. The Hirschsprung heirs must settle that in the future! Incredible!" he exclaimed, in utter dismay. "At this moment, John, all that I said to you in the garden a few weeks ago occurs to me,—you could not have a more striking illustration of my remarks."

The Professor did not answer. He had stepped to a window, and his face was turned towards the garden. No one could judge of the effect of his agitated friend's appeal to him.

For a moment it seemed as if Frau Hellwig under-



stood that she had wilfully subjected herself to an endless succession of most annoying and even distressing consequences,—her attitude suddenly lost its air of conscious infallibility and unassailable self-confidence, and the contemptuous smile which she struggled to maintain almost faded from her lips. But it could not be,—no unforeseen combination of circumstances could ever produce in Madame's mind any remorse for anything she had done. She did everything in the fear and to the glory of the Lord,—any fault or error was impossible. She recovered herself instantly.

"I must remind you, Herr Franz, of what you mentioned yourself a little while ago," she said coldly and formally. "The deceased is justly accused of mental aberration,—it would not be at all difficult to adduce sufficient proof to substantiate the charge. Who will then maintain that that ridiculous valuation was not written in the wanderings of insanity?"

"I will!" cried Felicitas, with decision, although her voice shook with the violence of her conflicting emotions. "I will defend the dead from those attacks as long as I live, Madame Hellwig. There never existed a clearer, healthier intellect than hers. My declaration can, of course, possess no legal weight; but should you succeed in refuting all other evidence of her unclouded mind, the portfolios in which the collection was placed still exist—those I rescued! Each one contains on the inside of the cover a complete index of its former contents, with a faithful account of how and at what cost each autograph was obtained."

"Aha! I have then nourished in my own house a witness against me!" sneered Madame. "But it is your turn to be called to account. How dared you deceive me through all these years with such unexampled insolence?"



You have eaten my bread while you scoffed at me behind my back. If it had not been for me, you would have had to beg your bread from door to door! Out of my sight, treacherous hypocrite!"

Felicitas did not stir from the threshold. Her slender form seemed to dilate beneath the reproaches heaped upon her; her face was deadly white, but the fearless pride, the unbending spirit of the girl had never been as manifest as it was at this moment.

"Your reproach that I have deceived you I deserve," she said with most admirable composure. "I have been uniformly silent, and would have endured death, sooner than have allowed a hint of my other life to pass my lips,—that is true. Nevertheless, my resolution could have been easily shaken—one kind, cordial word from your lips—one gentle glance from your eyes would have sufficed to overthrow it, for nothing is more odious to me than concealment of any kind. But there was no sin in my deceit. Who would call the early Christians deceivers because they assembled in times of persecution in direct opposition to the law? And I too had my soul to save!" She took breath and riveted her clear brown eyes with an expression of the greatest decision upon Madame's face. "I should have been plunged into blackest night, had I not found an asylum and protection in the rooms under the roof. In the wrathful and avenging God, to whom you pray, who tolerates the existence of a hell, and leads his children into temptation that He may try, prove, and then punish them,—in this implacable Supreme Being, I never could believe, Madame Hellwig. My dear old friend revealed to me a Heavenly Father who is all Love and Pity, Wisdom and Omnipotence, and who alone rules in heaven and on earth. The desire of study, the appetite for knowledge was unquenchable in



my childish soul,—if you had starved my body, Madame, it would not have been as cruel as were your systematic efforts to fetter my thoughts, to kill my mind. I have never scoffed at you, for when I was with *her* your name was never mentioned, but I have baffled all your plans with regard to me. The old Mam'selle has been my teacher!"

"Begone!" cried Frau Hellwig, no longer mistress of herself, pointing towards the door.

"Not yet, dear aunt!" begged the young widow, seizing the outstretched arm of the great lady. "You will not let such a precious moment slip without taking advantage of it, I hope. Herr Franz, you have performed your duty as a 'passionate lover of music,' most admirably,—let me entreat you to inform yourself with the same zeal concerning the missing bracelet and silver plate,—if any one can throw any light upon their whereabouts, it is this person!"

The young lawyer approached Felicitas, whose left hand involuntarily sought the support of the frame of the door, and, offering her his arm with a profound bow, he said, with kindly courtesy: "Will you permit me to conduct you to my mother?"

"Her place is here!" said the Professor suddenly, in a clear ringing voice. He had been hitherto entirely silent. Now he stood erect by the side of Felicitas, and grasped her right hand firmly in his own.

Young Franz recoiled involuntarily; for one instant the two men measured each other silently,—there was none of the warmth of friendship in their eyes.

"Ah, bravo! two knights at once—what a charming picture!" cried the Councillor's widow, laughing loudly. A cup dropped from her hand, and lay in a hundred pieces upon the floor,—a carelessness which would have



provoked a stern rebuke from her aunt at any other time,—but now Madame was speechless with anger and amazement.

“It seems to-day that I am repeatedly tempted to appeal to the past,” said Franz, in a bitter tone, interrupting the momentary silence. “Perhaps you may remember, John, that not long ago, in virtue of your guardianship, you fully empowered me to take my present step.”

“I neither forget nor refuse to acknowledge one iota of what I said. Should you desire a conclusive explanation of my inconsistency, I am always entirely at your service—but not here.”

He drew Felicitas from the threshold, and went with her into the garden.

“Go back into the town, Felicitas,” he said—and the gray eyes that used to glitter so coldly, rested upon her face with the utmost tenderness. “It shall be your last struggle, poor little Fay! This is the last night that you shall pass beneath my mother’s roof,—to-morrow, you shall begin a new life!” Unconsciously he pressed the hand, which he still held in his, close to his heart,—then dropped it and went back into the house.

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## CHAPTER XXIII.

FELICITAS left the garden with winged speed. The Professor was mistaken,—so far from spending the night, she would not even spend the evening beneath Madame’s roof. The moment had arrived, when she could go to Aunt Cordula’s rooms. In the narrow street she met



the old cook carrying the supper out to the garden. No one then but Heinrich was left in the house. How the gust roared and howled through the thick boughs of the old lindens! The wind drove the girl on,—but there was level, firm ground beneath her feet. What a walk was before her, over crumbling tiles in the rushing blast!

Heinrich opened the street door. Felicitas glided breathlessly past him, went into the servants' room, and took the key of the garret from the wall.

“What are you going to do now, Fay?” asked the old man, with surprise.

“I will bring back with me unstained honour for you, and freedom for myself, Heinrich,” she cried, in her excitement. “Keep steady watch here below,” and she ran up the stairs.

“Do nothing rash. Fay child, Fay!” he called after her, “don't run into any danger,”—but she did not hear him. He had to remain upon his post below stairs, and walked impatiently up and down the hall.

As Felicitas reached the long corridor, upon which the garrets opened, the wind moaned above her in long sighing gusts, which ended in low whistling tones. The woodwork creaked, and the sultry breath of the storm blew in sudden blasts through the hollow water-pipes along the edge of the roof. Just now, a mottled gray and white hail-cloud hung above the four roofs,—a lurid light quivered over the hanging flower-garden, glistened like a deceitful eye upon the glass panes of the door, above which wreaths of ivy, loosened from the wall by the wind, hung helplessly, and illuminated strongly the tossing leaves of the wild vines.

As she put her head out of the garret window a violent gust blew directly in her face—it took away her breath and forced her to draw back. She let it rage by, and



then leaped out. Any one who could have seen that beautiful pale face, with its tightly-compressed lips and its air of stern determination, emerge from the dark garret window, would have admitted that the girl was fully aware of the terrible danger she was braving, and that she was prepared to encounter death, if need be, in pursuit of her object. What a strange mixture this young creature was! A head so cool and clear above a heart throbbing so wildly and capable of such strong passion.

With an airy tread she ran along the creaking gutters, and no giddiness dimmed her clear eyes for an instant,—but her roaring foe gave her scarcely time to breathe—with a shrill whistle he was down upon her again with terrific force. The glass door of the gallery flew open, and some large flower-pots fell from the railing to the floor, and the crumbling tiles trembled and creaked beneath Felicitas' feet. She was still upon the next roof, but with her hands she clasped the railing of the gallery which she had just reached.

The gust loosened her hair and tossed about the thick masses as if to scatter them abroad, but she herself stood firm. After a moment of patient waiting to recover her breath, she swung herself over the railing into the gallery and instantly entered the music-room. Behind her the storm moaned and roared, but she no longer heard it—she never thought of the death that threatened her return; with clasped hands hanging idly before her, she stood in the cool ivy-wreathed apartment—it was her last glimpse of it. The calm snow-white faces upon the walls looked like old friends, and yet so strangely unfamiliar,—they had once informed this room with life, for their living thoughts had been conjured up to float around their pale brows—but now they were mere ornaments, decorations of the wall,—they looked impartially upon the youthful



figure of the coquettish young widow and the pale girlish face now lifted to them, streaming with tears.

For the rest, the room looked just as cosy and comfortable as during Aunt Cordula's lifetime. There was not a speck of dust upon the large piano—countless tender sprays of ivy were shooting forth everywhere from the green walls in token that they were kindly cared for, and in a recess by one of the windows stood a young caoutchouc tree and a slender little palm which the old Mam'selle had specially delighted in, and which had evidently been carefully tended. But the other window looked oddly,—the delicate little work-table stood there no longer—the Professor had adopted this corner as his study.

A burning blush rose to Felicitas' cheek. Here she was standing like a thief in his room. Who could tell what letters and papers might be lying there, which no strange eye should see,—he had left them exposed without fear, for he carried the key of the room in his pocket,—she flew across to the old cabinet. On one side of the old piece of furniture, in the middle of a richly-carved arabesque ornament, there was a little metal knob, which could hardly have been perceived by an uninitiated eye. Felicitas pressed it firmly and the door of the secret repository flew open. There lay the missing treasures in all their former order. The antique silver coffee-pot and cream-jug—the heavy bundles of spoons tied up with silk ribbon—the old-fashioned case containing the set of diamonds,—all these things occupied the same places in which they had lain in dim concealment for so many years,—there in the corner was the casket with the bracelet, and beside it—yes, beside it—was the gray box, pushed a little on one side, just as the old Mam'selle had hurriedly thrust it there a few weeks before,—evidently she had not touched it again.



Felicitas lifted it with trembling fingers,—it was not light,—its contents must be destroyed,—but how? What was it made of?

She carefully lifted the cover—a thick book, bound rather coarsely in leather, met her eyes,—the stiff leaves were gaping open, and the corners of the covers were bent and worn with age. One shy glance within told the girl that the pages of this book were covered not with printed but with written characters.

Two eyes, Aunt Cordula, are resting upon your secret—two eyes in which you have countless times read faithful childlike love and devotion, and a youthful heart, which has never for one instant swerved from its faith in you, is throbbing to solve the riddle of your life. It is as firmly convinced of your innocence as of the existence of the shining sun, but it would know why you suffered so—it would comprehend the magnitude of your life-long sacrifice. Your secret shall die—these leaves shall crumble to ashes, and the lips which even in earliest childhood so well understood how to hold their peace, will forever be as silent as your own.

The girl's trembling fingers opened the book. '*Oscar von Hirschsprung, Studiosus Philosophiæ*,' was written in bold characters upon the first leaf. It was the journal of the young student, the nobly descended son of the shoemaker, for whose sake, as report averred, Aunt Cordula had literally worried her father to death. The writer had only used one side of each leaf, leaving the other for future annotations. But these others were covered closely with the delicate handwriting of the old Mam'selle.

Felicitas read the beginning. Profound original thought, with a rare power and felicity of expression, riveted the attention and forced reflection. He must have been a remark-



able man—the shoemaker's young son—with a brain full of gorgeous fancies and the soundest judgment, and a glowing heart full of the tenderest affection! And therefore Cordula, the stern merchant's daughter, had loved him to the death. Thus she wrote:

“Your eyes are closed forever, Oscar, and you did not see how I knelt beside your couch and wrung my hands in passionate entreaty that God would spare you to me. In the delirium of fever you called my name repeatedly in tones of ardent love,—but then too there were times when your cry for me seemed to come from the depths of a wounded heart and to breathe revenge,—when I spoke to you, you looked at me with strange eyes in which was no recognition, and pushed my hand away.

“You have gone in the belief that I have broken my vow to you,—and when all was over, and they had removed you from your couch, I found this book under your pillow. It tells me how I have been loved, but it tells me also that I have been doubted, Oscar! I longed and watched in your death-agony for only one conscious look—one would have convinced you that I was true to you, and my sad fate would have been robbed of its keenest sting. In vain! There is no greater torture for the soul than to part forever from one who is dearest to it unreconciled. If I had committed the blackest crime, my punishment could not be greater than to carry about with me this heart, which will not rest, but cries out and urges me on like the outcast Cain.

“Your stronger spirit is released, and is exploring new realms, but I must wander here upon this little earth without even knowing whether you can look back to me,—I can speak to none of my inward struggles, and I do not wish it—for who could understand my loss? No one except myself knew you. But once only, I must tell how it



all happened. You have written down your thoughts in this book; bold and striking as they are—there comes from them a refreshing breath of tender and undying love for me, Oscar. Your words speak to me as from your living lips, and in your sympathetic voice. I will answer you here, upon the same pages where your hand has rested. And I will fancy that you stand beside me—that your deep dark eyes are following my pen as stroke by stroke the riddle is made plain before you!

“Do you remember the day when little Cordula Hellwig was searching for her favourite white chicken which the house-dog had chased into the house? She found it in one of the deserted rooms in an upper story, where only a board partition divided the merchant's mansion from the humble dwelling where lived the shoemaker Hirschsprung. The room was dark and gloomy, but through a crack between the boards the golden light was streaming, and thousands of motes were playing in the pillar of sunshine. The little girl peeped through the crack. In there, neighbour Hirschsprung had just housed the golden grain from his small field, and high upon the yellow sheaves sat his wild boy Oscar, with his black eyes and raven curls.

“‘You can't find me!’ cried the child through the crack. The boy sprang down and looked searchingly and boldly around him. ‘You can't find me,’ repeated the girl. Then came a crash, and one of the boards behind which little Cordula was peeping fell in upon the floor of the room where she was. Yes, Oscar, it was your work! and I know how you would have levelled other barriers, and destroyed many a false worldly structure which had been carefully erected, if you had lived, just as you threw down the old planks behind which the little girl was teasing you.



"I cried bitterly with fright, and in a moment you were all gentleness and tenderness, and through the gap you led me down stairs into the smoky little room where your father was at work. The board was replaced, but from that time I ran across to see you every day. Ah, what winter afternoons those were! Without, the wintry wind roared, and the snow beat against the little round leaded panes of the window, where the geranium on the sill quivered with the violence of the storm outside, and the goldfinch that was usually so merry, retreated to the farthest corner of his cage. But within, the coffee was heating on the gigantic stove,—your good mother was spinning at her wheel, while your father upon his bench worked for his daily bread.

"I can still see his grave melancholy face as he told us of by-gone days. Then the Hirschsprungs had been a powerful family—a famous race, gigantic in form, and mighty in prowess. What a multitude of heroic deeds had been done by their strong arms! But I shuddered at the tales of the rivers of knightly blood which they had spilt. I liked much better the story of the knight who loved his young wife so faithfully and tenderly. He had two bracelets made, and upon each was engraved half of an old love song; he wore one, and his dear wife the other. And when he fell mortally wounded in battle, a savage foe tried to tear from him the costly love-token, but the dying man clutched the jewel convulsively with his left hand, which was almost hacked in pieces before his squire could come to his aid. The bracelets were kept in the family as relics until—yes, until the Swedes came. Ah, how you hated those Swedes, Oscar! They were the cause of the downfall of the Hirschsprungs. It was a sad, sad story, and I could not bear to hear your father tell it, for he always concluded with 'Ah, Oscar.



if that had not happened, you could have gone to the University, and have become a great man,—but now there is nothing for you but the shoemaker's bench.' Ah, the story had another side, which he knew nothing of!

"The Hirschsprungs were all good Catholics,—they clung to the old faith when the whole country was converted to the Lutheran doctrines. On account of their religion they lived in strict retirement; but this did not satisfy old Adrian von Hirschsprung, who was a zealous Papist, and would rather give up his knightly mansion and his Thuringian home than dwell among heretics. He sold his possessions, with the exception of the mansion on the Square, for sixty thousand thalers in gold coin, and his two sons rode off one day to purchase a home for him in some Catholic country. Then it happened that the Swedish king, Gustavus Adolphus, with twenty thousand warriors, came marching through Thuringia. He halted for one day at the little town of X——, on the twenty-second of October, 1632, and his troops were quartered upon the townsfolk. The old knight's house upon the Square was also crowded with Swedish soldiers, who filled old Adrian with rage and abhorrence. A terrible quarrel arose between the knight and the half-drunken men, sitting at their wine in the court-yard, and then the dreadful deed was committed; a common soldier stabbed the stern old Papist to the heart. He fell back with extended arms upon the stones of the court-yard, and died upon the spot without a word. But the furious Swedes destroyed and burned everything in the house that they could lay their hands upon, and when the sons came home to tell the results of their expedition, old Adrian was lying beneath the aisle of the church of the Holy Virgin, and they sought in vain for their inheritance. The Swedes had carried off the sixty thou-



sand thalers, chests and caskets were empty, and their contents lay torn and trampled under foot; the family papers were scattered to the four winds—not a sheet of them was left. This was your father's story, Oscar. And thus the old house was sold for an insignificant sum to the merchant Hellwig. The two sons of Adrian shared the proceeds of the sale. Lutz, the elder, left the town, and nothing was ever heard of him again; but the other, who remained here, hung his knightly sword upon the wall, and the descendants of those who had fought the Saracen, and whose bravery and high-born courtesy had graced imperial halls, took to spade and hoe.

“You did not follow their example, Oscar. As the thick locks above your forehead curled and waved, defying all but nature's own arrangement, so your spirit left the narrow paths which your father and his father's father had pursued, and followed its own course in life, although you knew that that course must be thorny and stony, that privation and want must be your close companions. You only saw the goal, the lofty brilliant goal—and your heroic courage led you to a garret to die. The spirit fled because the body starved! Almighty God! to think that one of thy noblest creatures died from want!

“Who that had ever listened to your noble thoughts and glorious dreams for the future could have pictured such an end to your high hopes! And when you sat at the piano with such wondrous melodies breathing from your fingers! A wretched little spinnet stood in one corner of your father's room, its tones were dull and harsh, but your genius inspired it—it could utter the wild tones of the tempest or bring visions of a smiling heaven above a sunny world. Do you not remember how your good father rewarded you when he was pleased



with you? With what a solemn air he would open a little antique secretary and place a manuscript music-book upon the desk of the old spinnet! It was Johann Sebastian Bach's operetta—his grandfather had received it as a gift from the great composer, and it had been guarded like some saintly relic by the family. When you left the world you left in your room not a penny of money, not a crust of bread, but this manuscript of Bach's—whose material value you well knew—was found upon your table directed to me.

“On the other page just opposite to where I am now writing stands written ‘My sweet Cordula, with her golden curls, came in to-day in a white dress,’—that was the day of my confirmation, Oscar. My stern mother told me it must be my last visit, for that I was now grown up and there must be no intercourse between the wealthy merchant's daughter and the shoemaker's family. Your parents were not in the room and I told you of my mother's prohibition. How pale your face grew beneath your coal-black curls! ‘Well, go then!’ you said roughly, stamping your foot, but your voice broke, and tears filled the angry eyes. I did not go—our trembling hands suddenly met in a clasp which death only could sever—that was the beginning of our love.

“Could you think that I could forget this, and after withstanding for years the angry entreaties of my parents, break my troth to you of my own free will? They called you a beggar, the vagabond son of a shoemaker, who would never earn a living, even with all his grand ideas—they threatened to curse and cut me off, but I was firm, and it was easy to be firm, for you were near me. But when your parents died and you went to Leipzig to study, then a fearful time came! One day, a tall, slender figure appeared in my father's house, a man with a pale



face and sly cunning lines about his mouth and around his eyes which looked out from under a low forehead crowned by straight thin hair. My instinct was true, Oscar, I knew that evil crossed our threshold in that man's shape. My father judged this Paul Hellwig otherwise. He was a near relative of ours, the son of a man who had made his way in the world, and was now installed in a lucrative office. Thus the visit of our young cousin was an honour to us, and he had a low bow and a sweet sanctimonious smile and word for all!

"You know how the wretch dared to speak of love to me, and you know how indignantly I rejected him—he was mean and dishonourable enough to appeal to my father, who ardently desired the connection, and now terrible days for me began. No letters came from you. My father intercepted them. I found them with my own among the papers which he left. I was treated like a captive, but no one could force me to remain in the room when he entered it. I flew then like some hunted thing through the house, and the spirits of your ancestors protected me, Oscar,—I found many a hiding-place where I was secure from discovery.

"Was it the invisible finger of one of these spirits which one day pointed out to me a glittering gold coin upon the ground?

"A wall in the poultry-yard had sunk somewhat, and workmen had been busy in the afternoon in repairing the damage, and had torn down the defective portion. I was sitting upon the ruins dreaming of the time when these stones had first been heaped together, when, just at my feet, I saw a golden coin lying in the grass. It was not the only one, and, in the masonry of the wall, there was a yellow glimmer. Probably a large portion of the hugely thick wall had fallen after the workmen had left the yard,



for there was a great pile of rubbish lying there, and from among the broken edges of the part that was still standing, projected the sharp corner of a wooden chest—there was a crack in one side of it, and through this crack the yellow gold gleamed.

“Oscar, I did not follow, as I should have done, the shadowy finger of your ancestor. I called my father, and the man whom I loathed came into the poultry-yard with him. They together extricated the chest, and turned the large key, which was yet sticking in the lock.

“The Swedes had had nothing to do with it, Oscar. There lay the two bracelets carefully preserved—there lay the sixty thousand thalers in gold and the yellow parchments and papers of the Hirschsprungs. Old Adrian had concealed everything here as the Swedish army approached. I was intoxicated with joy. ‘Father,’ I exulted, ‘Oscar is no longer a beggar!’

“I see him still as he stood there! You know his face was grave and stern; mirth was hardly possible in his presence, but his whole appearance bore the impress of incorruptible integrity. He was more respected than any one else in the town,—but now he stood leaning over the chest plunging his hands into the heap of golden coin. What a strange glance fell upon me from his cold eyes! ‘The shoemaker’s son!’ he said, ‘what has he to do with it?’

“‘Why, this money is his, father!’ I had old Adrian’s will in my hand, and pointed to the name of Hirschsprung.

“Oh, how terribly his face changed!—that face usually so rigid.

“‘Are you mad?’ he cried aloud, shaking my arm violently. ‘This house, with all which it contains, belongs to me, and I should like to see who can rob me of one penny of my property!’



“‘You are quite right, dear cousin,’ affirmed Paul Hellwig in his gentlest voice. ‘But some years ago the house, with all that it contained, belonged to my grandfather.’

“‘Yes, Paul, I do not deny your claim,’ said my father. They carried the chest into the house. No one knew of what had happened except myself and the last ray of the setting sun which had glided curiously over the golden store. It faded to rise again on the morrow upon many a happy human being, but I wandered about seeing only night and woe and crime wherever I looked.

“That very evening I heard from my father that Paul Hellwig had claimed and received twenty thousand thalers and one of the bracelets.

“Do you know now what I endured while you were thinking me faithless and frivolous? I stood alone in the struggle with my two tormentors. My stern but upright mother was dead, and my only brother was away travelling in foreign lands. They no longer required of me only that I should renounce my love for you—I must bind myself to secrecy concerning all that I knew—secrecy toward you and toward the world—and this I could not do. Did not your heart sometimes throb in sympathy with mine at the times when I firmly confronted my father, even when his hand was raised to strike to the earth his ‘obstinate and unnatural daughter?’

“I had retained in my possession old Adrian’s will—they did not know that—and one evening, when Paul Hellwig contemptuously asked how I could prove the discovery of the treasure, I referred to this paper,—and then came the fearful end! My father had just returned from a public dinner, his face was flushed,—he was evidently somewhat excited by wine. Upon my reference to the will, he seized my wrists in his iron grasp, and held them so tightly that I cried out with the pain. while



he looked savagely in my face, and asked me whether his respectability was worth nothing to me. He had scarcely uttered the last word, when he dropped my hands, his face grew purple,—he put up both his own hands to his neck, and suddenly fell powerless upon the floor at my feet. He still breathed when we lifted him up. Yes, he was even conscious, for his gaze rested upon my face with a fearful, imploring look. Then, Oscar, I gave up! When the physician left the room for a moment, I drew out the will from my bosom and held it to the lighted candle. I could not look at my father,—but with averted face, I took a solemn oath that I would be silent forever, that no blot should stain his honour by my consent. And Paul Hellwig smiled like a fiend as he heard my oath. Oh, Oscar, this I did. I secured to my family your inheritance, just at the time when want had stretched you upon your death-bed!”

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## CHAPTER XXIV.

FELICITAS closed the book,—she could read no further. Without, the storm howled and beat against the window-panes, so that they rattled again,—but what was their raging to the tempests that had torn the soul of her whose hand had written what she had just read!

Aunt Cordula had been racked and tortured. Those who revelled in the possession of stolen wealth, had taken up their position upon the pedestal of hereditary virtue and integrity, and had rejected her as utterly depraved,—and the blind world had confirmed the sentence passed



upon her. She had lived alone, slandered and defamed,—but not one word of her secret ever passed her sealed lips. She had called down no curse upon the world of the little town at her feet,—but many of those who believed her guilty, had been nourished and supported by her helping hand, which was never closed against a suffering fellow-creature. Her strong mind had created its own world,—and the gentle smile which transfigured the features of the old Mam'selle, was proof of the triumph of her exalted nature.

What an inexplicable riddle is public opinion! The world contains nothing more untrustworthy, and yet how often it decides the entire earthly fate of individuals! Do not whole families sometimes suffer for years, under the ban which public opinion has passed upon one of its members; and are there not other families who live always surrounded by a nimbus of hereditary virtue and honesty which they have been at no pains to acquire, simply because public opinion declares them 'good!' Ah, how much bold knavery goes unpunished, how much quiet merit unrewarded, at the arbitrary nod of public opinion!

The Hellwig family had always stood on the loftiest height of an hereditary stainless reputation. If any one had dared to point to the stateliest and most solemn of the portraits which hung on the walls of the large room in the second story and declare: that man is a thief! the accuser would have lost caste at once,—and yet that stately merchant had robbed the poor shoemaker's son of his inheritance—had died with this crime on his soul, and his posterity prided themselves upon the wealth—'hardly and honestly earned'—of the old house. Ah, if he who had sacrificed his own hopes in life to time-honoured tradition—who had so long held to the belief that virtue, intellect, integrity were the consequences of rank



and position, while personal worth had so little weight—could only have had a glimpse of these pages!

Involuntarily Felicitas lifted the book high in air, as if in triumph, and her eyes sparkled,—what prevented her from leaving the little gray box with its terrible contents there upon the writing-table? He would enter and sit down unsuspectingly in the pleasant ivy-hung room. With his mind full of his work he would take up the pen to go on with the manuscript before him. Suddenly he would see the strange little box,—would raise the cover, take out the book, and read—read till the blood should forsake his cheek and the light of the still gray eyes grow dim under the load of the terrible discovery. His proud self-confidence would be gone forever. In secret he must bear the burden of his disgrace. The comfort that he takes in his luxurious surroundings is stolen joy,—when he thinks of his respectable name—there is an ugly blot upon it,—his peace of mind is fled—destroyed for all time!——

Box and book fell to the ground, and the hot tears streamed over the girl's cheeks. No! a thousand times rather die than do him this injury. Were the lips from which those last words came gaspingly the same from which, within these four walls, so short a time before, the words had proceeded—"I know that I should feel no pity for any misfortune that might happen to him, and if by only raising my finger I could do him a kindness, I should never do it?" Was it really the old wild hate which forced the tears from her eyes and filled her heart with woe at the thought of his possible suffering? Was the sudden glow with which she conjured up his well-knit, powerful figure before her mental vision, aversion? and had the blissful conviction that she was destined to guard him from an annihilating blow any connection with the



hateful desire for revenge? Hate, aversion, and the wish for revenge—they were all extinguished in her soul! On she was drifting, rudderless. She staggered and covered her face with her hands. The mysterious struggle within her was made clear to her now,—not by the light of a heavenly ray revealing a sunny landscape before unsuspected, but by a lurid flash of lightning showing her the abyss before her, upon whose brink she was tottering.

Away, away from the spot! There is nothing to keep her here any longer. Across the roofs once more,—then a step over the threshold of the old house and she is free—gone never to return—gone forever.

She picked up the book, dropped it into her pocket, and, holding her breath for a moment, stood as if stiffened into stone,—in the passage without a door was heard to shut, and hasty steps approached the room where she was. She flew to the glass door and tore it open. The wind rushed in, blowing large drops of rain into her face. Her eyes wandered over the four roofs,—she could not pass over them now—she would be seen—her only safety was in immediate concealment.

On the broad railing at the side of the gallery, out of sight of any one standing within the glass door, there was a narrow space unoccupied by any flower-pots. In an instant Felicitas had climbed upon it, and, as the rushing wind struck her, she seized and steadied herself by the iron elbow of the lightning-rod which was carried over the roof of the apartments just at this spot. Ah, how the gust shook the slender figure, threatening in a new access of rage to hurl her down the abyss which yawned on one side of her into the street below! Black storm-clouds were driving furiously above her. Was there no angel behind that tossing, tempestuous mass to



stretch his arms protectingly over the young girl who was wrestling with such frightful peril?

If any one should come out upon the gallery now, the girl standing there must be in his eyes as a thief. She had entered a closely locked and bolted apartment,—the world called such an act burglary. Suspicion that she knew all about the missing silver had already been attached to her, and now her guilt would be clear as daylight. She would not be allowed to leave the old merchant's house voluntarily—she would be expelled from it, with the brand of crime upon her brow—and, like Aunt Cordula, she would be obliged silently and innocently to bear the burden of unmerited disgrace and shame as long as she lived. Would it be so hard to yield herself up to the fury of the storm, and, after only a few moments of agony, breathe out her young life upon the stones of the street below?

She looked once more towards the glass door,—the person who had entered the room had not fulfilled Felicitas' last despairing hope by remaining behind it. Spite of the storm and rain, he stepped out further and further upon the gallery, and now she could see who it was—it was the Professor. Had he heard the girl's retreating steps? His back was turned to her—it was still possible that he might return without seeing her, but down swept the traitor-blast—it forced the Professor to turn round, and wildly tossed the garment and hair of the fugitive,—and he saw the girl, her face looking down upon him, white and ghostly, with despairing eyes, from among the tossing masses of loosened hair, while one arm was convulsively encircling the lightning-rod.

For one moment it seemed to her that all the blood in her body forsook her veins beneath the look of horror with which he gazed at her, and then it rushed wildly



to her head and robbed her of the last remnant of self-possession

"Yes, here stands the thief! Bring the officers of justice! call Madame Hellwig! I am discovered!" she cried with a wild laugh. She let go the lightning-rod for a moment and put back her hair which the storm had blown about her face.

"For God's sake," shouted the Professor, "clasp the rod tightly,—you are lost!"

"It were better for me if the end had come!" sounded wailingly through the roaring and whistling of the wind.

He did not see the narrow space upon which Felicitas was standing. In an instant he threw over the boxes of flowers and mounted to her side. With irresistible force he clasped her struggling form, drew her down to the gallery and into the apartment. The door closed after them with a crash.

The girl's strong courageous spirit was broken; utterly bewildered, she was unconscious that her supposed accuser was still supporting her,—her eyes were closed, and she did not see how earnestly his gaze was resting upon her pale face. "Felicitas," he whispered, in a deep tone of entreaty.

She started up, and her consciousness returned. Once more the bitter hatred which she had fed in her soul for so many years seemed to take possession of her,—she tore herself away from him, and again the old demonic expression lighted up her face,—the deep frown appeared between her eyebrows, and the lines around her mouth grew hard and full of scorn.

"How can you touch the Pariah!" she cried. But her erect form staggered again,—she buried her face in her hands and said, in a smothered voice: "Question me,—my statement shall satisfy you!"



He took her hands gently between his own.

"You must first be more composed, Felicitas," he said in that tender soothing tone which had touched her in spite of herself by the bed of the sick child. "Forget the wild words with which you always seek to wound me. Look round,—see where we are. Did you not play here when a little child? Was it not in these rooms that the lonely woman, whom you so bravely defended to-day, extended to you protection, instruction, and love? Whatever you did here, or came for, I know well that it was nothing wrong, Felicitas. You are defiant, wounded,—and very proud,—and this sometimes makes you unjust and unkind,—but you are utterly incapable of meanness. I cannot tell why,—but I felt that I must find you up here. Heinrich's shy, embarrassed face—his involuntary glance towards the stairs when I asked after you, confirmed me in the thought. Do not say a word!" he continued, raising his voice, as she lifted her burning eyes to him, and opened her lips. "I will question you—but not in the sense that you mean—and have I not some right to question you after climbing through wind and storm to bring down my noble fir-tree?"

He drew her further into the room,—it seemed as if the light near the glass door was too brilliant for him,—he needed the half-twilight of the more retired part of the apartment to speak further. Felicitas felt his hands tremble. She stood just upon the spot where a few moments before she had had so fearful a struggle with herself—where she had been tempted to stab him to the heart, to inflict a wound upon him that he would carry with him as long as he lived. She bent her head like one convicted of guilt beneath the eyes, once so grave and serious, which now glowed with such intensity of feeling.

"Felicitas, you might have fallen," he said, and at the



mere thought a shudder ran through his powerful frame. "Shall I tell you what you have caused me with your unconquerable pride, that would rather die than appeal to the calm reason of others? Do you not think that a moment of such concentrated agony—such indescribable despair—may partly expiate the injustice of years?"

He ceased, waiting for a reply, but her pale lips did not move, and her eyes sought the ground.

"Your own embittered views of all that I can do and say have actually grown into your very soul," he said, after a moment of vain expectation, in a despairing tone. "It is impossible for you to believe in any change." He had dropped her hands, but he took her right hand once more and pressed it to his heart. "Felicitas, you said a little while ago that you idolized your mother, this mother called you Fay, all who love you call you thus. Listen to me when I say 'Fay, I pray you to forgive me!'"

"I am no longer angry," she managed to gasp out in a smothered voice.

"That is much—much from your lips—more than I had a right to expect,—but it does not content me. What consolation is it to know you are reconciled if we must part never to meet again? What comfort can I have in knowing that you are no longer angry if I cannot convince myself of it at all hours? When two people who have been as far apart as we have been are reconciled, they belong to each other. I cannot endure that a single mile should separate us. Ah, go with me, Fay!"

"The life in the school which you propose to me would be odious, I cannot conform to its rules," she answered hurriedly and with effort.

The shadow of a smile flitted across his countenance.

"Oh I do not propose it to you!—That school plan was only a pretence, Fay. I could not have endured it



Why, one, two days might have passed without my seeing you, and when I did see you a dozen impertinent girls might have stood around us hearing all that we said, or Madame Berg, the strict disciplinarian, would have been present, and would never have suffered me to take this little hand in mine. No, I must be able to look into this dear proud face every hour of the day,—I must know that when I return home after the weary labour of the day, my Fay is waiting for me and thinking of me. On still evenings when we are alone together I must be able to entreat for a song, Fay,—but all this can only—ah, be my wife, Fay!”

Felicitas uttered a cry and tried to extricate her hands from his clasp—but he held them more firmly than before.

“The thought terrifies you, Felicitas,” he said, in great agitation. “Let me hope that my abruptness has some share in causing your terror. I know that a long time must elapse before you can respond to me—with your character the change must be a slow one which can convert a detested enemy into an object of affection. But I will woo you with the patience of undying love; I will wait—hard as it will be—until you yourself, of your own free will, say to me: ‘John, I will!’ I know what miraculous changes can take place in the human heart. I fled from the little town to escape from myself and the fearful struggles in my soul,—and what happened? The previous conflict was insignificant in comparison with the torturing longing that possessed me. I knew that I had been endeavouring to crush out my eternal happiness.

“Fay, in the midst of gay conversation and coquettish faces, the lonely girl with her proud bearing and her white brow, behind which dwelt such a brave honest



spirit, was always by my side wherever we went,—over hill and dale, she belonged to me; she was the other half of my life. I could not tear myself from her without inflicting upon myself a mortal wound! And now give me one kind consoling word, Felicitas.”

The young girl had gradually withdrawn her hand from his. How was it possible that the change in her face and figure while he spoke should escape him? The eyes from which all hope seemed to have departed were riveted to the ground: the forehead was contracted as if with physical pain, and the icy hands were clasped convulsively.

“Shall *I* give you consolation?” she rejoined in a low tone. “An hour ago, you said to me, ‘This shall be your last struggle,’ and now with your own hand you plunge me into the most fearful conflict that the human soul can undergo. What is the struggle with foes without in comparison with a conflict within with one’s self?” She raised her clasped hands and threw back her head with a gesture of despair. “What crime have I committed that God should put this wretched love into my heart!”

“Fay!”

He extended his arms to draw her to his breast,—but she repulsed him with outstretched hands, although a ray of joy lit up her face for one moment. “Yes—I love you—you shall know it,—I love you,” she repeated in tones vibrating between exultation and tears. “I could at this moment say ‘John, I will!’ but these words shall never be spoken!”

He started back,—he knew the girl with that proud bearing and fair forehead much too well not to fear that this declaration was a death-blow to his hopes.

“You fled from X——, and why?” she began again, looking most searchingly into the eyes whose glow had



entirely added. "I will tell you. Your love for me was a crime against your position,—your name; it contradicted all your most cherished prejudices and ideas, and was to be rooted out of your heart as unworthy of you. That you return from your flight uncured was not your fault. The same power which forces me to love you against my will, conquered you. You must have had a hard struggle before you could ask the player's child to take her place among your proud, respectable merchant kin,—nothing in the world could convince me that I should retain this place forever! You told me a few weeks ago of your unalterable conviction that inequality of position was always an obstacle to happiness in marriage. You have held firmly to this conviction for God only knows how long, and it is impossible that in six weeks it can have vanished, leaving not a trace behind; it is only whitewashed over—suspended for awhile. And, even if it has yielded to other convictions, what time must not elapse,—what changes must not occur before the remembrance of your declaration can fade from my mind!"

She ceased for a moment, exhausted. John had covered his face with his hands. Now he dropped them slowly, and said, with despairing composure: "The past is all against me,—and yet you are wrong, Felicitas. O God, how shall I prove it to you!"

"There has been no change, not the smallest, in our outward circumstances," she continued unrelentingly. "No stain has fallen upon your family, nor has anything occurred to elevate my despised position,—it is my personal influence alone which has effected this change in you; it would be rash and unjustifiable in me to take advantage of the moment when, hushing with determination the voice of your firmest convictions, you give ear only to the voice of love. I ask you, upon your con-



science, do you not value above all things the unstained past of your family? And have you succeeded in persuading yourself for one moment that those ancestors, whose wives were always of equal rank with their own, could look with favour upon the alliance of their descendant with a juggler's daughter?"

"Felicitas, you say you love me, and yet you can torture me so frightfully!" he cried.

Her gaze, which had rested unalterably upon his countenance, melted. Who had ever before seen in those proud eyes the unutterable tenderness which now glowed in them! She took his right hand in both her own.

"While you were, a little while ago, describing to me life by your side, I suffered more than I can tell," she said, deeply moved; "hundreds of others, perhaps, would, in my place, have shut their eyes to the future, and seized upon present happiness,—but, made as I am, I cannot do this. During my whole life the dread that you might repent your act would stand like a phantom between us. At every gloomy look of yours—every frown upon your forehead, I should think: 'The time has come now, he laments his conversion from his former views—he has returned to them, and he inwardly blames you as the cause of his fall!' I should make you wretched with my mistrust, which I could never overcome."

"This is a fearful retaliation!" he said in a low suffering tone. "But I will gladly take this wretchedness that you speak of to my heart. I will bear your mistrust, however wounding it may be, without a murmur. A time must come when all will be clear between us. Felicitas, I will make a home for you where anxious thoughts dare not intrude. It may indeed often happen that I shall bring home with me gloomy looks and frowns,—but if I can find my Fay there, the frowns will disappear, the



gloom be changed to sunshine. Can you really find it in your heart to trample your own love under foot and to render wretched a man whom you can make supremely happy?"

Felicitas had gradually approached the door—she felt that her resolution was proving false to her against his pleading eloquence, and yet for his sake she must be firm.

"If you could live with me alone, and in retirement," she replied as she seized the handle of the door as if it were her last refuge, "I would willingly follow you. Do not think that I dread the world and its sentence—its judgments are almost always blind and undiscerning, but I fear the enemy within you in intercourse with society. There a 'respectable origin' is everything, and I know that you agree with the world. You have great family pride, although at the present moment you give no ear to its warnings, in intercourse with others sooner or later the thought would come that you have sacrificed much, very much for me."

"In other words, if I would call you mine, I must either give up all hope of being of any service in the world, and live in a desert, or I must search out some stain, some unworthy act in the past of my family!" he exclaimed.

A flaming blush suffused her cheek at these words. Involuntarily her hand glided among the folds of her dress, and she felt for the sharp corners of the little gray box, that she might be sure it was quite safe in its hiding-place.

The Professor walked up and down the room in the greatest agitation.

"The stern unbending element in your character never yields, I know it well," he continued. "It fascinates and



embitters me at the same time. Even at this moment, when with harsh consistency you trample my affection beneath your feet and condemn yourself to such a useless sacrifice, my love burns stronger than ever. I know well that I cannot for the present advance one step with you, —but give you up! I do not dream of it. Your assurance that you love me I regard as a solemn vow. You will never be false to me, Felicitas?"

"No!" she replied quickly, and entirely against her will a ray of unutterable love beamed from her eyes.

The Professor put his hand upon her head and gently bent it back, looking in her face with a gaze in which pain, anger, and passion were strangely mingled. He shook his head as her eyelids fell and her lips closed firmly beneath his scrutiny—and then he sighed profoundly.

"There,—go!" he said with forced composure. "I consent to a temporary separation, but upon condition that I may see you often wherever you are, and that you will write to me and let me write to you."

She blamed herself for her weakness in extending her hand to him assentingly, but she could not resist the temptation to accord him this consolation. He turned away and she left the room.



## CHAPTER XXV.

OUTSIDE in her agony she stretched her arms to Heaven. How had the torturing pain of these last moments caused all the other griefs of her young life to fade into insignificance!

Unconsciously she drew out of her pocket the little box—within it lay the secret which would level the barriers between the man whom she loved and herself,—it would weigh heavily in the balance against her mean origin,—was the tempter again assailing her? No, Aunt Cordula, your will shall be done—although this book would justify you so thoroughly! And he? Time will work wonders,—the pain of renunciation ennobles the soul. The fatal little book shall be destroyed instantly—it shall be consumed to ashes. Felicitas looked back once towards the room, where she could hear the Professor pacing restlessly to and fro, then glided down the narrow staircase, and noiselessly opened the painted door.

The traveller who, wandering through the meadows, steps unconsciously upon the writhing body of a snake, and sees the reptile erect his deadly fangs directly before him, is not more horrified than was Felicitas as she stepped into the corridor. Five fingers encircled with an iron grasp her left hand in which she held the little box, and close to her face glistened two greenish eyes,—they were the soft Madonna-like orbs of the Councillor's widow.

The beautiful woman had at this moment entirely thrown aside her fascinating garment of grace and ten-



derness,—how energetically and even roughly those ~~rosy~~ fingers, which were accustomed to be so gently folded in prayer, could clutch and hold! What an expression of satanic malice transformed those angelic features! They were scarcely to be recognized!

“How charming this is, my beautiful proud Caroline; I happen to meet you just as you are about to secure this lovely little jewel-case!” she cried with a jeering laugh as she seized also with her other hand the wrist which the girl was vainly struggling to free from her vice-like grasp. “Have the kindness to hold this little traitor one moment longer in your hand,—I would not have you let it fall quite yet. Have patience for one instant. I need a witness to prove in court that the thief was caught in the act. John! John!”

The young widow’s melting voice, usually so expressive of Christian love and pity, rang shrill and piercing through the corridor.

“I beg you, for God’s sake, Madame, let me go!” implored Felicitas in deadly terror.

“Not for the world! He shall see whom he placed by his side to-day. It was delightful to hear—‘Her place is here!’—was it not, my charming coquette? Your aim was, you thought, accomplished,—but I am here,—the game is not yet at an end!”

She repeated her cry for help,—it was unnecessary,—her cousin had already descended the stairs, and was just opening the door as Heinrich also appeared at the other end of the corridor.

“Oh, were you up there, John?” cried the Councillor’s widow. “I thought you were below. But the art of the juggler’s daughter is only the more admirable since she has contrived to conjure away your old aunt’s legacy from unde your very eyes!”



"Are you beside yourself, Adele?" he asked, quickly leaving the last stair, whence he had surveyed the incomprehensible scene in the greatest astonishment.

"Oh, not at all," she replied. "Do not think me violent, cousin, because I am compelled to undertake the office of a bailiff; but Herr Franz, you know, indignantly refused me his assistance in the discovery of the theft of the silver plate, and you yourself took this sweet innocent under your wing,—what was there for me to do but to act upon my own responsibility? You see these five fingers holding the casket which they have just brought down stairs,—so far, so good,—now we will see what the magpie was bearing off to her nest."

She snatched the box from Felicitas' hand. The girl uttered a cry and tried to recover it, but the young widow fled with her prey along the corridor, laughing loudly, as in feverish haste she lifted the cover.

"A book!" she muttered, disappointed,—the box fell upon the floor. She took the volume in both hands, held it open by its covers, and shook it violently,—there must certainly be banknotes, deeds, or some papers of value hidden between the leaves,—but nothing of the kind appeared.

In the mean time Felicitas had partly recovered from her terror. She followed the lady and earnestly requested her to return the book to her; but in spite of her forced composure her feverish anxiety was only too apparent.

"How,—are you really in earnest?" said the young widow spitefully, clutching the book tightly as she turned her back upon her. "You appear altogether too much disturbed to allay my suspicions," she continued, looking contemptuously back over her shoulder at Felicitas. "The book must have something to do with some plot of yours,—let us see what it is, my dear!"



She opened the volume,—it contained no banknotes,—nothing of value, only delicately written words upon its yellow leaves; but had a dagger been suddenly pointed at the young widow's breast from its ugly pages, she could not have been struck more utterly aghast than she was at the sight of the few words which met her eye upon one of the leaves which she had hastily turned over. The rosy face grew ashy to the very lips,—instinctively she covered her eyes with her hand, and tottered for one moment as though she were giddy.

But she had learned to control every outward look and action, in order to walk before the world surrounded by the nimbus of sanctity. She knew how to cast up her eyes piously to Heaven, while her heart was full of spite and malice,—she could listen with an air of intense devotion to a sermon, while her mind was busied with a charming new toilette,—she often lamented, with holy indignation flushing her cheeks, over the sinful ways of the world and the neglect of the Bible, while she was devoted in secret to the worst of French romances.

This incredible flexibility and elasticity of outward demeanour had often during her life stood her in good stead, and it did not fail her now. In a few seconds she had entirely recovered herself. She closed the book with an admirably simulated smile of disappointment.

"It is, indeed, wretched old trash!" she said to her cousin,—while, as if half unconsciously, she put the book into her pocket. "You certainly have been uncommonly silly, Caroline, to make such a noise about such nonsensical stuff!"

"Did *she* make the noise?" asked the Professor, stepping quickly towards her, and with difficulty controlling himself. "I thought you called me to your assistance, that you might convict this young girl of the theft of



the silver in the presence of witnesses. Do me the favour to justify now, here upon the spot, your shameful accusation?"

"You see that I really am not prepared, instantly——"

"Instantly!" he interrupted her. "You must recall on the spot this insulting charge; and in Heinrich's and my presence make the fullest apology for all you have said and done!"

"Most willingly, dear John! It is our Christian duty to acknowledge and beg forgiveness for an error. My dear Caroline, pray forgive me, I have done you injustice."

"And now give back the book," said her cousin, in a harsh, unrelenting tone.

"The book?" she asked, with all her old air of naïve innocence. "Ah, dear John, it does not belong to Caroline!"

"Who told you that?"

"I saw Aunt Cordula's name written in it. If any one has any right to it it is yourself, as heir to her books and furniture. But it is apparently not of any value,—it seems to be filled with old poetical extracts. What would you do with such sentimental stuff? But I like such old yellow books. In spite of their worn soiled leaves, they have a great charm for me. I pray you give it to me?"

"Perhaps I may, after I have looked at it," he replied, shrugging his shoulders, and holding out his hand for the volume.

"But I should value it much more, if you would give it to me without looking at it," she continued, in a gentle, coaxing tone of entreaty. "Do not let me think that you wish to ascertain the actual worth of the only present that I have ever asked you to make me!"

The Professor looked angry indeed. "I declare to you,"



said he, "that what you may think of my persistence is a matter of entire indifference to me. I insist upon seeing the book,—I suspect you. Some extracts from old sentimental poetry could scarcely suffice to make so self-possessed a lady as yourself turn suddenly pale with terror."

As he spoke he stepped in front of her,—her uncertain glance which had measured like lightning the length of the corridor, and a quick gesture betrayed unmistakably that she wished to take to flight. Her cousin seized her hand and detained her.

Felicitas was beside herself at the thought that he might attain his purpose. It was terrible to see the book in the possession of the dissembler, but she acknowledged to herself that it was as safe there as in her own hands, and that it would certainly be soon devoted to destruction. She therefore placed herself by the side of the young widow to assist her flight if necessary.

"I pray you, Herr Professor, to let your cousin keep the book," she entreated with all the serious composure that she could command at this critical moment. "By its perusal she can easily convince herself that she was too hasty in supposing that the little box could contain anything of value."

The first distrustful glance that she had ever seen in the steel gray eyes scanned her face—it was like the stab of a knife,—she crimsoned and cast down her eyes.

"And you too come with an entreaty!" he said. "There is certainly something more in the matter than 'sentimental trash.' I remember now that my cousin declared that you looked very anxious, and I confess to having observed the same thing. Now I ask you, 'upon your conscience,'—'What does the book contain?'"

It was a terrible moment,—Felicitas struggled for com-



posure,—she opened her lips, but they refused to utter a word.

“You need not trouble yourself,” he said to her with an ironical smile, while he grasped still more firmly his cousin’s wrist, as she writhed in all directions to escape from him. “The book then contains no poetic fancies, but facts,—and facts which I shall most certainly make myself master of at all hazards. Will you at last have the great kindness, Adele, to give up to me what, as you have already declared, is my own property?”

“Whatever you do to me, you shall never have it,” the Councillor’s widow replied with despairing energy—dropping in her fierce passion her rôle of childlike gentleness. She made a violent effort to extricate herself, and succeeded,—she flew down the long corridor, but at the end of it stood Heinrich, his arms spread out like a wall, filling the entire passage. She shrunk back. “Insolent wretch! get out of my way!” she cried, stamping her foot frantically.

“In a moment, most gracious lady,” he replied very quietly and respectfully without altering his position one hair’s breadth,—“only give up the little book, and I will step aside instantly!”

“Heinrich!” cried Felicitas, rushing up to him, and attempting to pull down his arms in her despair.

“Ah, that’ll do no good, Fay,” he said with a grin as his old bones easily withstood her efforts to move them. “I am not as stupid as you think. You’d be very likely to do yourself an injury out of pure good nature,—and I won’t have it!”

“Let the lady pass, Heinrich!” said the Professor gravely. “But let me tell you, Adele, that I shall immediately adopt all the means in my power to recover my property! No one can hinder me from supposing that



that book contains important revelations concerning my aunt's estate—possibly it may allude to portions of her property that have hitherto lain undiscovered.”

“Oh no, no!” cried Felicitas interrupting him.

“It is my affair to suppose what I choose!” he rejoined sternly,—“and you as well as Heinrich can testify, if need be, before the proper authorities that this lady has perhaps appropriated a considerable portion of my family property.”

His cousin started as though stung by an adder. She looked savagely at her unrelenting tormentor, and then the frenzy took possession of her under whose sway she tore up handkerchiefs and shattered cups. She snatched the book from her pocket and threw it upon the floor at his feet with a shrill, bitter laugh.

“Take it, you stubborn fool!” she cried, and her whole frame quivered convulsively. “I wish you joy of your prize. Bear the disgrace which you will find in it with what dignity you may!”

She flew along the corridor, down the stairs, and they heard the door of her own room locked and bolted behind her.

Her cousin looked after her with an expression of utter contempt, and then picking up the book, he examined for a moment its clumsy covers, while Felicitas' eyes were riveted in the greatest anxiety upon the hands that held the volume, and that might open it at any moment. His features betrayed a mixture of anxious thought and painful emotion,—the last mysterious words of the Councilor's widow had evidently not shocked him, he had apparently expected some such termination to the previous scene—it only remained to be ascertained what manner of disgrace had been foretold him. Suddenly he looked up into Felicitas' beseeching brown eyes,—what power



those eyes had over the stern man! It seemed as if some gentle hand passed over his face, smoothing the wrinkles on his brow, while a half smile quivered about his lips.

"And now you must be brought to judgment!" he began. "You have shamefully circumvented me; while you confronted me up-stairs with an appearance of integrity upon which I would have staked my existence you were carrying the Hellwig family secrets about with you in your pocket. What must I think of you, Fay? You can atone for such ugly dissimulation only by answering all my questions frankly without any reserve."

"I will tell you anything that I may, but then I beseech you, oh, I entreat you, give the book back to me."

"Is this my proud, wilful, unbending Fay,—this girl who entreats so bewitchingly?"

At these words of the Professor's, Heinrich noiselessly and wisely retired,—but at the bottom of the first flight of stairs he sat down in actual terror, and seized his gray head with both hands, as if to satisfy himself that, after what he had just heard, it remained in its old place.

"You went up to-day to the rooms under the roof expressly to get this book, then?" inquired the Professor.

"Yes."

"How did you get there? I found all the doors locked."

"I went over the roofs," she replied with hesitation.

"That is, through the upper rooms?"

She blushed. Although she was entirely acquitted of all sinister design, still her mode of entering what was now his room was suspicious.

"No," she said in great confusion, "there is no way thither through the upper rooms,—I got out of the garret window and came across on the roofs."



"In this fearful storm!" he ejaculated with horror 'Felicitas, your resolution is frightful!"

"There was nothing else for me to do," she replied sadly.

"And why were you so bent upon gaining possession of this book?"

"I looked upon it as a sacred bequest of Aunt Cordula. She once said to me that the gray box—I did not then know what it contained—must be destroyed before she died. Death surprised her suddenly,—and I was convinced that the box was not destroyed,—and besides, I knew that it lay hid in the secret repository where the silver was to be found. I could not point out that place to you without giving up the book also, which would then have fallen into wrong hands."

"Poor, poor child, how you must have suffered! And all this heroic daring and endurance has availed you nothing,—the book is after all 'in wrong hands!"

"Oh no, you will give it back to me," she entreated.

"Felicitas," he replied, "I pray you answer me most truthfully two questions. Do you know the exact contents of this volume?"

"Partly, since to-day."

"And do they compromise your old friend?"

She was silent. Perhaps if she replied in the affirmative he would return her the book, having no further interest in it, but then Aunt Cordula's memory would be stained by her act, and she would seem to confirm the terrible stories that accused her of crime.

"It is unworthy of you to contemplate a subterfuge, however pure the motives may be which lead you to do so," he interrupted the momentary silence. "Give me a simple yes or no."

"No."



"I knew it," he murmured. "And now be reasonable, and resign yourself to the inevitable. Felicitas, I must read this book."

She grew paler than ever, but she entreated no longer. "Do so," she cried, "if you think it consistent with your honour. You pry into a secret that was not intended for your eyes. At the moment when you open the book, you deprive the most fearful and sustained sacrifice of a woman's whole life of all result."

"You make a brave fight, Felicitas," he replied, "and were it not for the last words which that lady"—he pointed in the direction in which the Councillor's widow had disappeared—"uttered in her rage, I would give the wretched secret back to you without trying to discover it. But I must and will know what the disgrace is that stains my name—and if the lonely tenant of the rooms under the roof was strong enough to guard it from stranger eyes during her whole life, I think I shall be strong enough to endure the knowledge of it. It is doubly my duty to investigate the matter thoroughly. The Hellwig branch on the Rhine is apparently in possession of the secret, and possibly concerned in some villainy—although you cast down your eyes and are silent, I see plainly that I am right in my conjecture. Doubtless my cousin knew of this disgrace, and was only shocked to see it suddenly start up from the written page before her. Ah, there will be a heavy reckoning with these hypocrites! But take comfort, Fay," he continued most tenderly, gently stroking the hair above the forehead of the girl who stood before him in mute despair. "I could not act differently, although my reward for doing so should be to call you mine. I should even then have to say 'No.'"

"I shall never forgive myself," she moaned, "for my carelessness has doomed you to misery!"



"Let it console you, then, to know surely that your love will enable me to bear whatever fate may have in store for me in this life."

He pressed her ice-cold hand and went back to his room. But Felicitas leaned her hot forehead against the window-frame, and gazed down into the court-yard, where the rain was falling in such torrents that it seemed as if determined to wash away the stains of the murdered Adrian von Hirschsprung's blood from the pavement—and with it the blot upon the name of Hellwig.

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## CHAPTER XXVI.

AN hour later the Professor entered his mother's sitting-room. His cheek might perhaps be a shade paler than usual, but his manner and bearing expressed more decidedly than ever the manly determination and resolution which characterized him.

Frau Hellwig was sitting knitting behind her asclepias plant; row after row those large white hands completed—like the rounds of a ladder upon which she should mount straight to heaven—for it was a missionary stocking that she was at work upon.

Her son laid a little worn book upon the table before her.

"I must speak with you, mother, concerning a very important matter," he said,—“but first let me beg you to glance your eye over the contents of this book.”

She laid the stocking down in great astonishment, put on her spectacles, and took up the book. “Ah, those are



old Cordula's scribblings," she said harshly, but she began to read.

The Professor put his left hand behind him, and stroking his beard continually with his right, silently paced to and fro in the apartment.

"I cannot see what possible interest this childish love-affair with the shoemaker's son can have for me," cried Madame impatiently, after she had read a couple of pages. "What induced you to bring me the old trash? It scents the whole room with mould."

"I pray you read on, mother," said her son. "You will soon forget the disagreeable odour in what the book further contains."

She opened it again with evident reluctance, and looked over several pages. But suddenly the rigid features expressed great attention—the leaves were turned with feverish haste. A slight colour appeared in the pale cheeks, extended to the forehead and deepened to a flush. Strangely enough, however, Madame experienced neither terror nor horror, but testified only overwhelming surprise, in which there was soon a large admixture of contempt, as she let the book fall in her lap.

"These are wonders indeed! Who would have dreamed of such a thing! The honourable, highly-respected Hellwig family!" she said, striking her hands together,—in her voice hate, triumph, and gratified malice strove for the mastery. "Then the money-bags upon which my mother-in-law so prided herself were stolen,—aha! she flaunted it in silk and velvet,—she gave entertainments where champagne flowed like water, and where they all flattered the gay, brilliant hostess. And I had to wait upon her riotous guests! No one noticed, in the presence of the proud mistress of the house, the poor young relative who yet stood far above all those miserable rioters in her fear



of the Lord. How often have I ground my teeth and prayed to my God in my heart that he would in his righteousness punish their wickedness! He had already judged them. Oh, how wondrous are his ways! It was stolen money that they squandered. Their souls are doubly lost!"

Her son was standing still in the middle of the room. He had not for a moment foreseen such a result to his request that his mother would peruse the little book.

"I cannot understand, mother," he said after a short pause, "how you can hold my grandmother responsible,—she was entirely unconscious that the money which she spent was stolen. According to your view, our souls must be lost too, since we have gone on until to-day spending the interest of this sum. However, you will be only the more anxious to assist me in getting rid of the ill-gotten gold—in giving up every farthing of it as soon possible."

Hitherto in her astonishment, Frau Hellwig had remained sitting with her hands quietly folded in her lap. Now she started, and putting them upon the arms of her chair, she pushed it back a short distance upon the floor.

"Giving up?" she repeated, as if uncertain whether she had heard correctly. "To whom?"

"Why, to the Hirschsprung heirs, of course."

"How—pay such an enormous sum to the first miserable vagabond who may lay claim to it! Forty thousand thalers remained to this family after——"

"Yes, after Paul Hellwig, the man of unstained integrity, the champion of God, one of the chosen of the Lord, had appropriated twenty thousand thalers!" interrupted the Professor, trembling with indignation. "Mother, you say my grandmother's soul is lost because she un-



consciously lived upon stolen money. What does he deserve, who, in cold blood, could steal such a sum?"

"Yes, he yielded in a moment of temptation," she replied, without losing her composure. "He was then a young and thoughtless man, who had not yet entered the true path. Satan always selects the best and noblest souls to estrange from the kingdom of God,—but he has struggled out of the slough of sin, and it is written: 'There shall be joy with the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth.' He battles unweariedly for our blessed faith. The money has been blessed and sanctified in his hands; for he uses it for aims well-pleasing to the Lord."

"We Protestants have our Jesuits among us, I see," laughed out the Professor bitterly.

"And it has been just so with what fell into our hands," continued Madame, imperturbably. "Look around you! Does not the visible blessing of the Lord rest upon all our undertakings? If the sin still clung to the gold, it could not bring forth such good fruit. We, you and I, my son, have converted into a blessing what was once a crime, by our zeal in the service of the Lord—our pious lives."

"I pray you, mother, leave me out of the question," her son interrupted her, unspeakably shocked by what he heard. He pressed his hands upon his temples with an expression of acute suffering.

Madame cast one venomous glance towards him as he made his protestation, and then continued in a raised voice: "We are not justified in throwing away, to be squandered in riotous living, the means which we devote to such pious purposes. This is the principal reason why I shall oppose with all my might any revival of this forgotten story. My further reason is that, by stirring at



air in the matter, you bring disgrace upon one of your ancestors."

"He brought disgrace upon himself, and upon us all," said the Professor. "But we can at least rescue our own honour by refusing to be dissemblers."

Frau Hellwig left her arm-chair, and approached her son clothed in all the commanding dignity of her character.

"Well, then," she said, "suppose that I should agree with you in your ridiculous views. Let us take these forty thousand thalers, which, by-the-way, would reduce us to very moderate means of subsistence,—but let that go. Let us, I say, take this money, and return every penny of it. What, if the exulting heirs should then demand interest and compound interest,—what then?"

"I do not think they would be entitled to do so,—but if they did, we must remember that 'The sins of the fathers are visited on the children.'"

"I am no Hellwig by birth—remember that, my son," she interrupted him. "I brought an unblemished name—the same borne by your grandmother before her marriage—into this house. My father was court councillor, the shame does not touch me, and I am not inclined to make any pecuniary sacrifice to wash out the blot. Should I, do you think, starve in my old age on account of the sin of others?"

"Starve while you have a son who can take care of you! Mother, do you not know that I can easily provide a comfortable, even a luxurious old age for you?"

"I thank you, my son!" she said icily. "But I prefer to live upon my own income and be my own mistress. I hate a state of dependence. Since your father's death I have known no will but the Lord's and my own, and so it must be in the future. And now do not let us quarrel about nothing. I declare to you that I hold the whole



story to be an invention of that crazy old woman who lived under the roof. Nothing in the world can force me to believe it really true."

At this moment the door opened noiselessly, and the Councillor's widow entered. The beautiful creature had been crying, but not this time as a *Mater Dolorosa*,—the traces of her grief were plainly visible in her reddened eyelids, and in the blotches upon her velvet cheeks. Passion had raged within this tender soul,—there was no doubt of it, although she had done her best to conceal its undeniable consequences, and to present to the world a touching picture of suffering innocence. In order to hide her dishevelled hair she had wound around her head a white tulle scarf. The lovely face looking out from the airy cloud-like fabric, from beneath which some fair curls escaped, was most picturesque. She had evidently attempted to regain once more, by the aid of her tulle, her former expression of childlike grace.

She saw the fatal book lying upon the table, and started. Slowly, like some penitent, she advanced towards the Professor, and with averted face held out her hand to him—he declined to take it.

"Forgive me, John," she entreated. "Ah, I cannot account to myself for my impatience and irritation,—I, who am usually so placid in mind, how could I be so excited! But that miserable book is to blame. Only think, John, how it compromises my dear papa, and besides I so longed to save you at all risks from such a humiliating discovery. I really cannot help thinking that Caroline hunted up the wretched story that she might wreak her spite upon us before her departure——"

"Hold your slanderous tongue!" he cried menacingly, and with such suddenness that she was silent in terror. "You shall have the forgiveness that you ask of me," he



added, after a pause, regaining his composure by a struggle, "but upon one condition."

She looked at him inquiringly.

"That you tell me, without any reserve, how you arrived at the knowledge of this secret."

She stood silent for a moment, and then she began in a melancholy voice. "In papa's last illness, which, you know, we all feared would be fatal, he asked me to bring him from his secretary various papers, which I was to destroy before his eyes. They were Hirschsprung documents, which he had apparently preserved as curiosities. Whether the probable approach of death made him communicative, or whether he felt the necessity of telling some one of his past life, I cannot say,—but,—he took me into his confidence——"

"And gave you a certain bracelet, did he not?" asked her cousin, interrupting her.

She silently assented, looking up at him imploringly and helplessly.

"After this disclosure, do you still hold the contents of the book to be the wanderings of delirium?" said the Professor turning to his mother with a cold smile.

"I only know that this person's transcendent giddiness and folly exceed everything that I have ever imagined. The demon of vanity, always by her side, induced her to put on the strange bracelet which all the world would notice, that the pretty white arm might be noticed also."

The young widow cast one flaming glance upon her aunt, who so ruthlessly exposed her weaknesses—a glance which did not belong to her rôle of suffering penitent.

"I will not inquire, Adele, how the wearing of stolen property consists with the purity and innocence of your soul, about which you have so much to say upon every occasion," remarked her cousin with forced composure,—in his voice there was something like the low muttering



of a coming tempest. "It is for you to decide who is the most culpable, the mother who steals bread for her children, or the wealthy woman who revels in luxury and receives stolen goods. But that you could have the insolence to offer this stolen ornament so ostentatiously to the innocent girl who had just saved your child's life—you said expressly that you prized the bracelet highly, but that you would gladly sacrifice your most valued possession for Anna's sake—that you dared besides, in right of your stainless descent, to cast reflections upon that girl's birth, arrogating to yourself all the virtues which spring from spotless antecedents, and degrading her as of a depraved origin, while you were all the while cognizant of your father's deed,—*that* was so infamous an act that it cannot be judged too severely."

The young widow tottered, closed her eyes, and with uncertain hand grasped the table-cover as if to support herself.

"You are not altogether wrong, John," said Madame, shaking the apparently fainting woman roughly by the arm—all fainting women were an abomination to her—"there is some truth in what you say, but your last sentence was too much. Adele has certainly been very silly, but you must not on that account forget what is due to her position. Your comparison with the poor woman was, excuse me, rather out of place. There is a decided difference between keeping property that has no owner, and stealing bread from another's store. But that is all the result of these modern ideas that would always be comparing common people with those of rank and station. I am extremely surprised to hear *you* speak so. And to compare a girl like Caroline—such a low person—with a lady!"

"Mother, I declared to you this afternoon in the garden that I would no longer suffer these inexcusable assaults



upon Felicitas' honour," cried the Professor, while the veins upon his forehead swelled with anger.

"Oho! I must request a little more self-control and respect in my presence. Remember I am your mother," she said, commandingly, while she extended her hand with a repellant gesture, and an annihilating glance shot from her cold eyes. "You play the part of knight to this wandering princess excellently well,—in a little while there will be nothing for me to do but pay her the tribute of my deep respect."

"If I should ask you to do so, you would surely comply with my request, mother," her son replied with great composure. "I am sure you will not refuse her your respect and esteem when I tell you that I trust she will one day be my wife."

And—yes, the old house really remained standing after this announcement! The earth did not yawn and swallow up the little town with the unworthy descendant of all the Hellwigs, as Madame, in the first shock of astonishment, expected it would,—and he stood there cool and collected, the image of a man clear in his own mind, upon whom feminine rage, hysterics, and tears could make no more impression than tossing waves upon a rock.

Frau Hellwig staggered back, actually speechless; but the Councillor's widow instantly recovered from her impending fainting-fit and burst into hysteric laughter. The transfiguring tulle fell from her head upon her neck, disclosing the dishevelled hair in which the crimson rose placed there in the afternoon was perishing miserably.

"This is the end of your boasted wisdom, aunt," she cried shrilly. "Now it is my turn to boast. Who begged and prayed you to get this girl married at all hazards before John came home? I had a presentiment the first



time I looked at her that she would bring misfortune to us all. And now you must bear the disgrace to which you so resolutely shut your eyes. But I shall return immediately to Bonn, to inform our Professors' wives there what a charming creature will shortly claim admittance into their exclusive circle."

And she rushed out of the room.

In the mean time Madame recovered from her astonishment, and spoke again in all the conscious worth and dignity of her nature.

"I evidently misunderstood your last remark, John," she said, with great apparent calmness.

"If so, let me repeat it," he replied. "I hope to marry Felicitas d'Orlowska."

"Do you dare to avow such a purpose in my presence?"

"Instead of answering you, let me ask you, would you now consent to my marriage with Adele?"

"Most certainly would I! it would be a most suitable match—would fulfil my earnest wishes."

The Professor ground his teeth to control the flood of stormy words that rose to his lips.

"This declaration on your part deprives you of the last atom of authority to decide in any important question for me," he said with forced calmness. "You never take into consideration that this despicable woman, this wretched hypocrite, would poison my whole existence. You would sit here in your comfortable home and content yourself with saying of your absent son, 'He married most suitably.' Let me tell you, mother, that I cannot respect such boundless selfishness,—I long for happiness, and I can find it only with the orphan girl whom we have long treated so cruelly."

Frau Hellwig burst into a scornful laugh.



"I will still restrain myself," she said,—“but remember ‘A father’s blessing builds the son’s mansion, but a mother’s curse levels it with the ground.’”

“Can you maintain that your blessing could wash away Adele’s faults of character? Nor can a curse have any effect if it is pronounced upon an innocent head. You will not speak it, mother! God will not listen to it—it would come home to you and make your old age lonely and loveless.”

“What do I care! I only know two things in the world, they are what I think of—honour and disgrace. You shall respect my will—it is your duty to recall your words.”

“Never, mother, rely upon it!” cried her son, and left the room, while she stood like a statue with her arms stretched out in an attitude of command. Did those tight-drawn bloodless lips ever utter the curse? Not a sound was heard in the hall,—if it were uttered, the air refused to carry it,—a God of love does not entrust such terrible power to the wicked and revengeful.

In the large square of the court-yard the shadows of night were already falling. The rain had ceased, but dark flying storm-clouds were driving and chasing each other across the sky as if seeking to unite their forces for another attack.

In the young widow’s rooms doors were opened and shut hastily, trunks pushed about, and clumsy and tripping footsteps heard running to and fro,—the tenants there were packing up for departure never to return. “Aha, this is the end of the forget-me-nots!” muttered old Heinrich to himself with delight as he carried a large trunk into the passage.

How composed and calm after all the bustle and hurry the pale young face looked behind the bow-window across



the court-yard! A kitchen lamp was burning on the table, and beside it stood the little sealskin trunk containing Felicitas' childish wardrobe. An hour before Madame, stocking in hand, had given orders to have 'the girl's things' all taken to her 'that she might have no reason for spending another night in the house.' Felicitas was just examining the old seal by the dim light of the lamp when the Professor's pale face appeared outside of the bow-window.

"Come, Felicitas,—you must not stay a moment longer in this wretched house. Leave those things here,—Heinrich can take them to you to-morrow."

She threw her shawl over her shoulders, and met him in the hall. He took her hand firmly in his, drew it under his arm, and conducted her through the street until he rang at Madame Franz's door.

"I bring you a fugitive," he said to the old lady, who received them in her comfortable, well-lighted room with a smile of welcome, but in great astonishment. He took her hand and laid Felicitas' within it. "I confide her to you, dear friend," he said, significantly, "guard and protect her like a daughter—until I can ask her of you again."

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## CHAPTER XXVII.

FELICITAS had only passed through a few streets and crossed two thresholds, and yet what a change had these few steps effected in her outward and inward existence! The huge pile of the old house on the Square lay behind her, and with it she had cast off all traces of the unkindness which she had endured. Wherever she looked now,



she saw only bright sunshine,—there was not a particle of gloomy pietism in her new abode,—not an atom of that stern pretence of religion which brooded over the Hellwig house, like some dark bird of prey. A healthy interest in all that was going on in the world, and a cheerful, affectionate home-life characterized the Franz household. Felicitas felt in her element. There was a pleasing pain in the sound of the old endearing names which Aunt Cordula had once given her, and which she now heard again. She became at once the pet of the two old people—Councillor and Madame Franz.

Thus her outward life was changed indeed,—and how was it with her inward life? She was herself not clear concerning that, but her uncertainty was not hard to endure. That evening when the Professor had called her, she had left her few possessions, without a word,—in the hall she had laid her hand in his and followed him willingly, without asking him whither, and if he had led her along the dim streets, and away through the gate of the little town, she would have followed him still without a shade of distrust or doubt. She was an odd combination. With all her burning imagination, her strange enthusiasm, she was unrelenting in her demand for a firm foundation of principle and well-trained will in life. The Professor's earnest pleadings—his agonized entreaties had wrung her heart, but had failed to effect any change in her fixed resolution,—something else was needed to win her entirely, and this something had happened without his knowledge. When he refused to return the book to her he had said—"I could not act differently, although my reward for doing so should be to call you mine." In spite of the grief and distress then racking her very soul, her heart bounded at the thought of the clear manly strength of will that obeyed the call



of honour at all hazards. She was filled with that boundless confidence in him without which life by his side would have been impossible for her.

Every day he came to Councillor Franz's. He was graver and more reserved than ever,—he was bearing burdens heavy to be borne. His residence in his mother's house had become unendurable. Apparently the previous unusual mental agitation had affected even her iron nerves. She became ill and was confined to her bed. She persistently refused to see her son,—Doctor Boehm attended her,—but her illness of course detained the Professor in X——. In the mean time he had imparted the family secret to young Franz as curator of the possible Hirschsprung heirs, and had announced to him his determination to atone for the wrong. His friend endeavoured to combat his resolution, or at least to modify it from a legal point of view,—but the Professor shattered his arguments by the simple question—‘Do you consider the money honestly come by?’—to which even the young advocate could not say ‘yes.’ However, Franz agreed with Madame that it was a coil about nothing, for he had no faith in the existence of any Hirschsprung heirs. But he was not inclined to spare the respectable Paul Hellwig—the strait-laced relative on the Rhine—a nervous shock, and therefore the champion of the Lord was legally summoned to produce the stolen twenty thousand thalers. The pious man replied quietly, with his accustomed unction, that he had undoubtedly received that amount of money from his uncle, in liquidation of an old debt owing to his father from the principal branch of the Hellwigs. Whence his uncle had procured the money he had no idea,—it was no affair of his, and gave him no concern whatever. At present the money was in the best possible hands,—he did not consider his property as



belonging to himself,—it was the Lord's,—he was only the steward of his wealth. He should most assuredly retain the sum alluded to, and was quite sure the law, which must decide, would justify him in so doing.

Nathanael's views were very similar. It made no possible difference to him that some man who had been dead for half a century had committed a crime,—he did not consider it his duty to whitewash other people's characters, and should certainly not yield up one penny of his inheritance. He looked forward with great composure, he wrote, to the future lawsuit, which would cost the probable heirs dear, and his lofty-minded brother his good name.

“Then there is nothing for me to do,” said the Professor, throwing the two letters, which bore such witness to the keen sense of honour of the Hellwigs, upon the table, “but to sacrifice every penny of my inheritance, if I do not wish to be an accomplice in the crime.”

And thus the last two weeks of the holidays gradually slipped away. Frau Hellwig had left her bed, but had declared her firm resolution of never seeing her son again, unless he consented to admit the whole Hirschsprung affair to be utter nonsense, and to give up all thoughts of Felicitas. Of course mother and son were separated forever.

Felicitas was in a state of mind not easy to describe. Every afternoon, in her new home at the accustomed hour she sat at the window with a beating heart—casting stolen glances into the street without—until a well-known powerful figure appeared in the distance. Then she exerted all her self-control not to run to meet him. He came nearer and nearer—looking neither to the right nor the left, his gaze riveted upon the window, behind which the lovely head was bent over its work; at last



the moment came when she could look up—their eyes met—ah, what bliss life contained of which the young heart hitherto had never even dreamed! The Professor never alluded to his love again. Felicitas might have thought that the experiences of the last few weeks had crowded it from his mind had it not been for his eyes—but those gray eyes followed her unweariedly as she moved about the room, busy with her household cares; they lighted up when she entered, or when she lifted her head from her work and turned her face towards him. She knew that she was still his Fay—whom he longed to dream of as waiting for him at home, and always thinking of him. And she whose heart had once been so filled with hatred, and whose looks had been so cold, did not dream what a charm there was about her now, how all the stern unbending points in her character were subdued by her soul-engrossing love.

But the time was to come to-morrow when she might sit at the window and await him in vain. In the afternoon, when his hour for coming drew near, he would be far, far away from her—a crowd of strange faces would separate him from his love—and perhaps a whole long dreary year pass before she should see him once more. She looked wearily into such a future—into which she was drifting.

The day before the Professor's departure, the Franz family and Felicitas were sitting at dinner, when the servant handed a card to the young lawyer. A deep flush of astonishment rose to his face—he threw the card upon the table and left the room. Upon the shining little piece of pasteboard was written 'Baron Lutz von Hirschsprung—from Kiel.' A manly well-bred voice was heard speaking in most excellent German in the hall,—and then the two gentlemen went into the lawyer's study.



While Councillor and Madame Franz were engaged in a lively conversation about this man, who had appeared as from the land of fable, Felicitas sat by them in the greatest agitation of mind. The poor player's child, who, deprived of every family tie, had hitherto lived entirely among strangers, suddenly knew that she was beneath the same roof with a near relative, connected with her by the ties of blood. Was it her grandfather or her mother's brother? Had that voice, whose quiet tones had thrilled through every fibre of her frame, once pronounced a curse upon the recreant daughter of the Hirschsprungs?

The stranger's name was precisely the one borne by his ancestor who had left X—— to seek his home in distant countries. It was engraved upon his card with aristocratic ostentation. We love to search out names from vanished ages. Involuntarily, at the sound of them some mailed knightly figure rises upon our mental vision, and they testify to aristocratic blood, although they suit oddly enough the pigmy race in black dress-coats of to-day. Evidently this branch of the Hirschsprungs valued its ancient ancestry most highly,—it would certainly have been difficult for the juggler's daughter to make good her claim to relationship with Baron von Hirschsprung. At the thought of a repulse, Felicitas' blood boiled,—she compressed her lips as if to keep down every quick word that might escape them in her excitement. But yet she could not control her ardent desire to see the man, and the opportunity was about to present itself.

Soon after the stranger's arrival, the lawyer sent for the Professor. The conference between the three gentlemen lasted for more than two hours. During this time of intense expectation, Felicitas continually heard the step of the Professor pacing to and fro. In her imag-



ination she saw the man of science as, stroking his beard with his white hand, he offered to the aristocrat money and estate that the stain might be erased from the honour of his name.

At length young Franz sent to his mother to say that when coffee was ready he would bring his guest with him to her drawing-room. Felicitas was giving a few additional orders in the kitchen when she heard the gentlemen descending the stairs. Her courage almost failed her as she saw the stranger in earnest conversation with the Professor pass slowly through the hall. He was tall—almost too tall, for his figure was rather slender—and every gesture betrayed the finished man of the world, while his whole bearing was that of one born to command—of the self-conscious aristocrat. He could not possibly be her grandfather,—the refined features with the short brown hair were far too young for that. At present he was bending towards the Professor with a courteous smile,—but his classic profile, with its sallow complexion and thin lips, was evidently more accustomed to express command than gentleness or sensibility.

Felicitas stroked her hair back from her brow with trembling hands and entered the room into which the servants had already carried the coffee. They were all standing in the recess of a window with their backs turned to her as she softly entered. She noiselessly filled the cups, and, taking up one, handed it with some courteous words to the stranger,—he turned abruptly at the sound of her voice, staggered back as though he had received a blow, while his face grew white, and his startled gaze wandered over the beautiful figure before him.

“Meta!” he gasped hoarsely.

“Meta von Hirschsprung was my mother,” she said in a low melodious voice, with apparent composure, although



she put down the cup which began to tremble in her hand.

"Your mother! I did not know that she had left a child," he muttered, endeavouring to master his emotion.

Felicitas smiled contemptuously, in part at the thought of her own weakness, which, spite of all her good resolutions, had betrayed her into acknowledging to this man her parentage. There had been not the faintest sound of love or sympathy in the tones of his voice, even when the sudden shock of surprise had thrown him off his guard, and she felt that she had exposed herself to great humiliation before all present, who were awaiting the denouement of the astounding scene in speechless amazement.

Gradually Baron von Hirschsprung's surprise passed away, but only to be succeeded by most painful confusion. He passed his hand over his eyes, and said stammeringly,—“Yes, yes, very true; it was in this same little town of X—— that the nemesis overtook that unfortunate woman,—a fearful but a just nemesis.”

He seemed to recover perfect self-possession as he uttered these last words. He stood erect, and addressing himself with well-bred grace to those present, said: “Pardon me; overcome by a momentary surprise, I did not remember that I was in the presence of others! I thought a drama, in which my family had some share, entirely at an end forever, when suddenly I am confronted with an unexpected after-piece! You are then the daughter of the juggler d'Orlowsky?” he continued, turning to Felicitas, and evidently attempting to express careless good humour in his tone.

“Yes,” she answered shortly, and confronted him without flinching, and a bearing as proud as his own. And now the strong family resemblance between the two was very striking. Pride was the distinguishing character.



istic of those nobly-formed features, although it was differently expressed in the two countenances.

"Your father then left you in X—— when his wife died? You have grown up here?" he inquired further, manifestly much impressed by the imposing figure before him.

"Yes!"

"The man had not much opportunity to provide for you—as well as I remember he died of nervous fever in Hamburg about a dozen years ago!"

"I learn from yourself for the first time that he is no longer living," replied Felicitas, as the corners of her mouth quivered, and a tear glittered in her eyes. But spite of the shock of this intelligence, she experienced a kind of satisfaction in the knowledge that there had been no truth in Frau Hellwig's repeated declaration that her father was vagabondizing about the world, without a thought for his child's welfare, thankful enough to leave her to the care of others.

"Ah, I am much pained to have been the means of communicating such distressing news!" said Baron Hirschsprung compassionately, shaking his head from side to side. "In him you have indeed lost the only relative that you possessed after the death of your mother. There was a time when I interested myself to discover this man's antecedents. He was left at a very early age entirely alone in this world."

"And may I be permitted to inquire, sir, in what relation the mother of this child stood to your family?" asked Madame Franz, irritated at the heartless manner in which he coolly excluded Felicitas entirely from the circle of his high-born race.

A slight colour suffused his face. Charming as is a blush upon the cheek of innocence, it is revolting upon



the countenance of an arrogant man who is evidently struggling to decide whether he shall disclose or conceal some degrading circumstance.

"She was once my sister," he said carelessly, although he emphasized the word *once* most decidedly. "I purposely avoided alluding to the fact," he continued, after rather a prolonged pause, "because, as matters stand, I am forced to make disclosures which may perhaps strike you as discourteous. I must communicate to this young lady several circumstances in connection with her mother which were perhaps better suppressed. Madame d'Orlowska ceased forever to be a member of the family von Hirschsprung the moment she became the wife of the Pole d'Orlowsky. In our family record, beside her name there is no mention, as is the custom, of the man whom the daughter of the house married. When she crossed our threshold for the last time, my father with his own hand erased her name from the book,—a proceeding infinitely more wounding to his aristocratic feeling than if he had annexed to it the black cross which signifies 'dead.' From that time no such name as Meta von Hirschsprung has existed for us, not one of our friends—not even a servant, has ever dared to utter it aloud,—my children do not know that they ever had an aunt,—she was disinherited, cast off, and dead for us long before the horrible accident that occurred here some years ago."

He ceased for a moment. During these disclosures, made in a manner so hard and offensive, Madame Franz put her arm around Felicitas and drew her toward her with the tenderness of a mother. And there stood the Professor—he did not speak—but his gaze rested uninterruptedly upon the pale face of the girl who was again called upon to suffer so cruelly for the sake of her 'idolized' mother. There was a moment of painful silence, a



silence which was eloquent with a stern condemnation. The speaker evidently could not ignore this fact—he continued with some hesitation. “Let me assure you that it is a hard task for me to give you so much pain. I appear even in my own eyes in such an—an unchivalrous light,—but, good Heavens! I must call things by their true names! I should be glad to do something for you. What position do you occupy in this very delightful household?”

“That of a dear daughter,” answered Madame Franz in Felicitas’ stead, as she looked searchingly at him.

“Then indeed yours is a most happy lot,” he said to Felicitas with a courteous bow to the old lady. “Unfortunately it is not in my power to vie with your noble protectress. I could not offer you the rights of a daughter of my house as my parents are both alive,—in their eyes the circumstance of your bearing the name of d’Orlowsky would be an unconquerable obstacle to ever receiving you into their presence.”

“How, her own grandparents!” cried the old lady indignantly. “Is it possible that they can know of the existence of their granddaughter and be willing to die without seeing her! You can never persuade me of that.”

“My dear Madame Franz,” replied the stranger, smiling coldly, “a deeply-rooted pride in the aristocracy of our house, and a keen feeling for its unstained honour, are the family characteristics of the Hirschsprungs, in which I share myself,—love with us always occupies a second place. I perfectly understand my parents’ views, and should in their stead do just as they have done.”

“Well, the men of your family may entertain such views as you describe,” said Madame Franz persistently, “but your mother—why, she must have a heart of stone to hear of this child and not——”



"She is the most unforgiving of us all," he interrupted the old lady, with assurance. "My mother counts among her noble kin several of the oldest names in Germany, and is more jealous of the honour of her house than any woman whom I have ever known. However, you are perfectly at liberty, my dear Madame," he added, not without a shade of irony in his tone, "to make an attempt for your protégée. I assure you that so far from opposing any such attempt, I will do all in my power to further your hopes."

"Oh, I pray you, do not say another word!" cried Felicitas in great distress, while she freed herself from the old lady's arm and took her hand beseechingly. "Be assured, sir,"—she turned toward Baron von Hirschsprung, calm and collected, after an instant's pause, although her lips quivered slightly,—"that it would never occur to me to lay claim to any rights once my mother's—she willingly gave up all such for the sake of her love, and after everything that you have just said, I can well understand how happy was the exchange which she made. I have grown up in the belief that I stand alone in the world,—nothing has occurred to change this belief. I have no grandparents."

"That sounds harsh and stern," he said with some embarrassment. "But," he continued, shrugging his shoulders, "as matters stand, I am compelled to desist from all attempts to alter your conviction. I will, however, do everything in my power for you. I have no doubt that I can succeed in inducing my father to allow you a considerable yearly stipend."

"You are very kind," she hastily interrupted him. "I have just told you that I have no grandparents,—you can scarcely expect me to accept charity from strangers."

He blushed once more, but this time it was the blush



of shame, which perhaps suffused those aristocratic features for the first time in his life. Evidently much embarrassed, he took up his hat. No one requested him to remain. In a few almost whispered words addressed to young Franz, he touched upon several matters of business, and then, as if actuated by a sudden impulse, he offered his hand to Felicitas, but she courtesied to him formally and profoundly, letting her hands drop slowly by her sides.

It was a harsh retaliation for the juggler's daughter to make upon a Baron von Hirschsprung; but it must be forgiven to her Hirschsprung blood. He recoiled in confusion, bowed with another shrug to the rest, and, stripped for the moment of all aristocratic dignity, left the room, accompanied by the young lawyer.

As the door closed behind him, Felicitas suddenly buried her face in her hands and burst into tears.

"Fay!" cried the Professor, and held out his arms. She looked up, and sought her refuge there. With her arms around his neck, she leaned her head upon his breast. The wild young bird was caged forever—it made not the smallest attempt to escape. Ah, what rest there was in those strong arms after its weary, lonely flight through storms and winds which had so tossed and beaten it!

At this moment the Councillor and his wife exchanged a significant glance, and noiselessly left the room.

"John, I will," she whispered, looking up at him with the tears trembling upon her eyelashes.

"At last," he said, clasping more closely her slender form. Those words made her his own. What a mingling of passion and tenderness glowed in the gray eyes that sought the smiling face upon his breast!

"I have waited and longed for those three words from



hour to hour," he continued. "Thank God, they come of their own accord! I must else have besought for them again this evening, and I doubt if they would have sounded as deliciously in my ears as now. Ah, Fay, must such hard trials befall me before you could consent to make me happy!"

"No," she promptly replied, extricating herself from his clasping arms; "it was not the thought of your trials and suffering that conquered me,—but it was when you so decidedly and consistently refused to give me back the book, that entire confidence in you first possessed me——"

"And a few moments afterwards, when the secret was disclosed to me," he interrupted, once more drawing her towards him, "I was convinced that in spite of all your pride, there was the deep, undying love of woman in your heart for me. You would have sacrificed yourself sooner than have had me suffer. Ah! we have both been taught in a hard school! and do not shut your eyes, Fay, to the task you have undertaken. I have lost my mother—my faith in mankind has received a cruel blow, and—I must tell you this too—I possess at this moment almost nothing except my profession!"

"Ah, what happiness to be with you!" she said, laying her hand lightly upon his lips. "I cannot hope to replace for you all that you have lost,—but whatever a devoted wife may do to brighten a man's life, that shall be unreservedly yours."

"And when will these proud lips ever condescend to make a request of me?" he asked, smiling down upon her. A blush overspread cheeks and brow.

"Ah, John, do not stay too long away from me!" she whispered beseechingly.

"And did you really think that I could go without



you?" he said with a gentle laugh. "If the intelligence did not seem to fit in so well just at this moment, you would have waited until this evening to learn that to-morrow morning at eight o'clock you will leave X—— for Bonn, accompanied by Madame Franz. Our dear old friend has joined the plot against you, my child,—upstairs in her guest chamber the trunks have been ready packed since yesterday,—was not my valuable advice asked and gravely given concerning the travelling hat which should rest upon that lovely head? One month you will spend as my betrothed with Madame von Berg, and then—then a charming wife will share the study of the grave Professor, who is, you recollect, to bring home angry looks and a frowning brow every day."

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Baron von Hirschsprung substantiated his father's and his own claims, as the only existing heirs of the Hirschsprung race, to the old Mam'selle's property, which was all handed over to him.

He declared all the Hirschsprung claims upon the House of Hellwig finally settled, when the Professor had added from his own inheritance thirty thousand thalers to Aunt Cordula's thirty thousand, thus completing the stolen sum of sixty thousand thalers. He exacted a thousand thalers from Madame Hellwig as indemnification for the burned operetta of Bach's, and she paid the money with grim reluctance only because she was assured that, in case of a lawsuit, her pecuniary sacrifice would be much more considerable.

"Why should I deny it?" said the young lawyer, with a blush and much agitation, to his friend the Professor, as they stood together in the recess of a window on the



morning of the departure of the latter, waiting for his travelling companions. "I grudge you Felicitas. I knew her for one of the rarest of God's creatures when I first saw her, and it will be a long time before I can—forget. But I have one consolation,—she has made another man of you, John, added a convert to the good cause of the inalienable rights of humanity. There could be no more thorough illustration of my healthy views concerning our social wrongs than the circumstance that,—forgive the bitter truth,—the proud Hellwigs were heavy debtors to the relatives of the despised player's child. Some of us stand apart looking arrogantly down upon others, and the blind world never dreams of how rotten at the core are its arbitrary institutions, and that it needs the fresh breeze of freedom to sweep away everything that can foster arrogance, heartlessness, and crime."

"You are right, and I accept all that you say," said the Professor gravely, "for, indeed, I have greatly erred—but the road along which I retraced my wandering steps was hard and very stony—and so do not grudge me my dearly-won prize."

The Professor introduced his young wife to the 'exclusive circle' of Bonn, as his cousin called it—and in spite of the last-named lady's malicious whispers, the beautiful creature was received everywhere with admiration and love. The picture which had so ravished his fancy became a reality. Felicitas soothes away every frown from his brow, and when in the evening, after a day of harassing professional care, he entreats, "Give me a song, Fay!" the same delicious contralto fills the room, which once drove him from his home to the Thuringian forest, because it so irresistibly attracted him to its wondrous possessor.

Much of the furniture in the house at Bonn reminds us of the rooms under the roof. The piano and the busts,



with the luxuriant ivy, now adorn Felicitas' own room. In the secret repository of the old cabinet, the young mistress of the house still keeps her old-fashioned silver,—but the gray box, with its contents, the Professor burned on the day when the claims of the Hirschsprungs were finally settled. Thus the account-book is destroyed, the wrong made right, and Aunt Cordula's spirit can pursue in peace its flight, which was begun while it was still in the body, to higher spheres.

Heinrich lives in Bonn with the young couple. He is held in high honour, and leads a most contented life. But whenever he passes on the street the velvet-clad Councillor's widow, who now dresses in silks and satins after the latest fashion, without a thought wasted upon white muslin,—while she turns away her head, as if she had never seen his honest face before, he mutters to himself with a grin, "Those forget-me-nots were never of the smallest use, most gracious lady!"

The beautiful woman can no longer adorn her white, faultlessly-shaped arm with the costly bracelet. Her father 'conscientiously' delivered it up to the Hirschsprung heirs, with the declaration that it had come into his possession by 'mistake or chance.' He lives at daggers drawn with his daughter, because she has had the 'inconceivable stupidity' to betray his share in the robbery of the Hirschsprung gold. She has been forced to give up the part which she could once play so well of childlike innocence and naïveté,—but indemnifies herself by unceasing activity in all pious projects for the conversion of heathen souls,—while her little Anna, left to the care of strangers, is doomed to an early grave. And he, the strict orthodox relative on the Rhine? It is not to be supposed that any nemesis will overtake him in this world. He will in pious resignation consider everything



that may happen to him, only a proof of his sanctity. We will leave him to public opinion,—the worst punishment that can befall a hypocrite is to have his mask torn off in public.

Frau Hellwig still sits behind her asclepias plant. Misfortune has at last crossed her consecrated threshold,—she has lost two children. Her son John she cast off, and one day she received news that Nathanael had been killed in a duel. He left behind him many debts and a sullied reputation. The iron expression of the rigid features is somewhat relaxed, and many maintain that the head, which was once carried so high in its assumption of infallibility, sometimes sinks wearily upon the breast. The Professor, a short time ago, wrote to announce to her the arrival of his first-born. Since that time, among the coarse, gray, and white balls in her knitting-basket, a small pink piece of knitting has lain concealed, upon which Madame works often in secret. Frederika declares that it is no missionary stocking, but a pretty little sock for a child. Whether the delicate rose-coloured articles will ever enclose the sturdy legs of the youngest member of the Hellwig family, we do not know,—but for the honour of human nature be it said: There is no soul so hard, that it does not contain some chord that will vibrate to affection, some tender spot,—although it is often unconscious of the treasure if nothing happens to reveal it. And perhaps the love of her grandchildren may prove this unforeboded, tender spot, from which a mild warmth may stream to dissolve Madame's icy nature.

We hope so, dear reader!



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